

***BUDDHISM IN ASSAM:
FROM EARLIEST TIMES TO 13TH
CENTURY AD***

***A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY***

***By
Boby Das
Department of History
School of Social Sciences***

***TO
NORTH EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG - 793022
MAY 2014***

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CERTIFICATE

I, Bobby Das do hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis, “Buddhism in Assam: From Earliest Times to 13th Century AD”, is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.

I further declare that all the suggestions made by the experts in the Ph.D. Pre-Submission Seminar have been duly considered and incorporated.

This Thesis is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

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CONTENTS

	Pages
Acknowledgements	
Abbreviation	
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction	1
CHAPTER 2	
Beginnings and Development of Buddhism in Assam	45
CHAPTER 3	
Forms of Buddhism in Assam	95
CHAPTER 4	
Impact of Buddhism on the Social Life of Assam	139
CHAPTER 5	
Buddhism and its Impact on Cultural Developments	172
CHAPTER 6	
Conclusion & Major Findings	202
Glossary	211
Bibliography	215

Abbreviation

ARASI	Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India
B.C.E.	Before Christian Era
C.E.	Christian Era
D.H.A.S.	Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam
I.H.Q.	Indian Historical Quarterly
J.A.R.S.	Journal of Assam Research Society
J.A.S.B.	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
J.P.A.S.B.	Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
J.R.A.S.B.	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal
PIHC	Proceedings of the Indian History Congress
PNEIHA	Proceedings of North East India History Association

Glossary

<i>Adi-Buddha</i>	The supreme primordial Buddha.
<i>Abhaya mudra</i>	Protective posture, palm out, fingers pointing up.
<i>Abhisekha</i>	Initiation, Consecration.
<i>Adhikara</i>	The spiritual head of neoVainavite sect in Assam.
<i>Agrahara</i>	Tax free land granted to Brahmana.
<i>Amalaka</i>	The ribbed disk at the top of a shikhara.
<i>Amitayus</i>	The Buddha of Longevity, a form of Amitabha.
<i>Anda</i>	The bell-shaped or dome-shaped body of a stupa.
<i>Animism</i>	Nature-worship, the earliest expression of human spirituality that also includes ancestor cult, shamanism, trance, spirit worship and totemism.
<i>Anjali mudra</i>	A posture having two hands closer in the chest together as if praying; submission, adoration; also called namaskara.
<i>Arch</i>	The curved upper part of an opening, such as a window or door.
<i>Arhathood</i>	Buddhist Nirvana, one who reaches Buddha hood.
<i>Avadhuti</i>	Avadhuti is a sect that has great affinities with the Natha sect that developed from Sahajayana School.
<i>Asrama</i>	Vihara, monastery.
<i>Aswamedha</i>	A horse sacrifice performed in public by those desirous of achieving victory in a battle /war.
<i>Avalokiteswara</i>	Mahayana Bodhisattva of compassion.
<i>Avatarvada</i>	Incarnation.
<i>Avayamudra</i>	A posture to manifest for the protection from any danger. In this posture, the finger of right hand points to sky.
<i>Abhiseka</i>	Consecration, coronation, or rite for royal investiture.
<i>Abhicara</i>	Black magic.
<i>Apabhramsa</i>	Middle Indic language of the period, employed by Buddhist siddhas.
<i>Barada mudra</i>	A posture to manifest to bestowing gift, In this posture, right hand shows to audience.
<i>Bargeets</i>	Spiritual song of Sankardeva.
<i>Bhakat</i>	Monk of neo Vainavite sect in Assam.
<i>Bhakti</i>	Devotion, The doctrine of salvation by faith.
<i>Bhikshu</i>	Buddhist monk.
<i>Bhikshu Sangha</i>	Community of monks.
<i>Bhumisparsa</i>	Earth-touching.
<i>Boddhicitta</i>	Realisation of ultimate truth or ultimate reality. According to Buddhist tantra it can experience through the esoteric practices.
<i>Bon</i>	The pre- and non-Buddhist religion in Tibet or early Tibet folk religion.
<i>Brahmana</i>	The first group (priest and teachers) in the four fold caste system.caste in India
<i>Buddhisatva</i>	In Mahayana Buddhisatva is enlightenment being, In Hinayana a future Buddha.

<i>Chaitya Hall</i>	A chaitya is any sacred place - a tree, spring, etc. In Buddhism, stupas are chaityas, and a building containing a stupa (functioning as a shrine) is called a "chaitya hall."
<i>Chakra</i>	1) "wheel," a solar symbol. (2) Vishnu's discus, a weapon. (3) A supposed center of psychic energy in the human body.
<i>Dakini</i>	A tantric deity.
<i>Dhyana</i>	Meditation.
<i>Devadasi</i>	Temple –girl /woman dedicated to a temple for providing service to the deity.
<i>Dohakosa</i>	Collection of couplets (dohas).
<i>Dharma</i>	The doctrine, the Buddhist teachings.
<i>Devi</i>	The Great Goddess, who is worshiped in India under a multitude of distinct forms. Any female deity in India can be considered as an aspect of Devi,
<i>Dharmachakramudra</i>	The hand position, in images of the Buddha that signifies his First Sermon.
<i>Dhyana</i>	Meditation.
<i>Diksa</i>	Initiation in religion.
<i>Dome</i>	An inverted hemispherical roof that covers many ancient and modern buildings and symbolically represents the vault of the heavens.
<i>Esoteric</i>	Inner, secret, mystical taught to a selected few.
<i>Exoteric</i>	Opposed to esoteric, external and fit to be communicated to public.
<i>Doha</i>	Form of versification commonly used by Buddhist Siddhas
<i>Gada</i>	Mace.
<i>Garbhagriha</i>	Womb chamber," the sanctuary of an Indian temple.
<i>Guru</i>	Preceptor.
<i>Guruvada</i>	Laid to the devotion to Guru.
<i>Guhyasamaja</i>	An important mahayoga-tantra.
<i>Heruka</i>	Buddhist divinity based on cemetery gods.
<i>Hevajra</i>	Male divinity in the Tantra.
<i>Homa</i>	Fire ritual, an Indian development of the ancient.
<i>Iddhis (rddhi)</i>	Occult powers attainable through religious practices.
<i>Kapalika</i>	Extreme form of Saiva yogin, who carries a skull and <i>Khatanga</i> .
<i>Kanjur</i>	Collection of sutras and tantra texts translated into Tibetan.
<i>Laity</i>	An English word used to refer to the general members of a religion (in Buddhism, Christianity, etc.) . In Buddhism, the opposite of laity is the sangha.
<i>Siva Lingas</i>	Linga A phallus, the aniconic representation of Shiva.
<i>Madhyamaka</i>	Middle Way school of Buddhist philosophy.
<i>Mahasukha</i>	Infinite blessings.
<i>Mahasukha</i>	Blissful state of mind or supreme bliss.
<i>Mandapa</i>	A columned hall in a temple.
<i>Mara</i>	In Buddhism Mara is the symbol of passion and desire.
<i>Mantras</i>	Hymns.
<i>Mandalas</i>	Diagrams of deity circles.

<i>Manjusri</i>	Mahayana and Vajrayana deity of transcendent insight (<i>prajna</i>), patron of scholarship.
<i>Mantra</i>	Ritual formula used in Vajrayana practice (see <i>Sadhana</i>).
<i>Mudras</i>	Postures, physical gesture.
<i>Namaghar</i>	Hall for congregational prayers in neo Vaisnavite sect of Assam.
<i>Nirvana</i>	State of release from the endless circling (<i>Samsara</i>) of rebirth in the world.
<i>Padma</i>	Lotus.
<i>Pancamakara</i>	The use of five ‘M’ – <i>mamsa</i> (meat), <i>madya</i> (alcohol), <i>matsya</i> (fish), <i>mudra</i> woman) and <i>maithuna</i> (sexual intercourse) by tantric practitioners.
<i>Parmita</i>	Perfection.
<i>Parinirvana</i>	Physical death.
<i>Pasupata</i>	A sect of Saiva yogins.
<i>Prajna</i>	Mahayana Buddhist hold <i>Prajna</i> as perfect knowledge, wisdom.
<i>Sadhana</i>	Spiritual discipline, practice or a spiritual practice.
<i>Samadhi</i>	A form of meditation widely practiced.
<i>Satcakras</i>	the mystic nerve centers).
<i>Satra</i>	Religious centers mostly found reference in neo-Vaisnavism in Assam.
<i>Sakti</i>	Female.
<i>Sangha</i>	Community of monks
<i>Shamanism</i>	Shamanism, a neolithic religious practice deriving from animism.
<i>Siddha</i>	Perfect one.
<i>siddhi</i>	Magical powers attained by the <i>siddha</i> .
<i>Sramana</i>	Wandering Buddhist <i>Bhikshus</i> (monk).
<i>Sutra</i>	Literary genre of Buddhist Text.
<i>Sunya</i>	Void, emptiness.
<i>Sunyata</i>	Emptiness, Both Hinayana and Mahayana agree realization of <i>Sunyata</i> leads to cessation of sufferings.
<i>Tanjur</i>	A translation of the doctrinal texts from the fourteenth century.
<i>Tatva</i>	Absolute.
<i>Trikaya</i>	Mahayanist interpreted Buddha is not a man but an eternal principle, and he has three aspects, namely, <i>Dharmakaya</i> , <i>Sambhogakaya</i> , <i>Nirmankaya</i> .
<i>Upaya</i>	Means, in vajrayana compassion. Mahayana Buddhist hold <i>Upaya</i> as Universal compassion.
<i>Upasaka and Upasika</i>	Common devotees (<i>Upasak</i> male, <i>Upasika</i> female).
<i>Vaidya</i>	Traditional Medical practitioner.
<i>Vaipulya Sutra</i>	A Mahayana form of Scripture.
<i>Vajra</i>	Palm out, fingers down: giving a blessing.
<i>Varada</i>	The <i>Vajra</i> stands for adamant path or <i>Sunya</i> vehicle. <i>Sunyata</i> is described as <i>vajra</i> because it cannot be changed, cannot be burnt and cannot be destroyed.
<i>Vam marg</i>	Left handed tantra.

<i>Varna</i>	Colour, caste.
<i>Varnasramadharmā</i>	Brahmanical Code of Conduct.
<i>Vihāra</i>	Monastery.
<i>Vinaya</i>	Buddhist rules of discipline that applies to monks and nuns.
<i>Vijnana</i>	Consciousness.
<i>Yantras</i>	A <i>yantra</i> is a geometric design, used as a meditation diagram.
<i>Yab-yum</i>	Embracing his female consort, he is generally known as <i>Hevajra</i> .
<i>Yoga</i>	General term for techniques of meditation and spiritual practice in Indian religions.
<i>Yogi</i>	Practitioner of yoga
<i>Yogini</i>	Female practitioner of yoga, demonical tutelary.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The introductory chapter deals with the geographical location of Assam, its ethnicity, political conditions, political ideology, internal, and external relationship, material structure- economy and trade, cultural /religious beliefs where Buddhism was introduced and developed. It also includes a review of literature.

Present Assam lies between the latitude 28°18' - 24° N and longitude 89°46' - 97°E in northeast corner of India. From the earliest period, the region retains its unique socio-cultural identities that shaped by its physical features, ethnology and material culture. There are different names that were used to mean the region corresponding to present-day Assam. In the classical period and up to the 12th century Pragjyotisha¹ and Kamarupa² are the two terms that were used in early literatures and inscriptions, to mean the region. In the later period, the term Pragjyotisha was used to imply the capital of Naraka³ that is identified with modern Guwahati. Buddhist used the term 'Lohicca', the synonym of *Lauhitya* (mentioned in *Digha Nikaya*)⁴, and *Waisali-long* to represent this region.⁵ In medieval times the Mughals used *Asham*, and the British used *Assam*. The term 'Assam' is of relatively recent origin and it can be traced back to the tradition of the Ahoms who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the thirteenth century.⁶

¹ It is referred to in the *Ramayana* that the city Pragjyotishpur was built on a gold crested mountain that was known as Varaha. For details, see K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1960, p.1.

² Among the epigraphic records, the name Kamarupa for the first time appeared in the Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol-II, p.8 as cited in B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004, p.1.

³ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1990, pp.59-60.

⁴ B. M. Barua, *I.H.Q.*, xxxiii, 203-205 cited in P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1988, p.28.

⁵ S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', *I.H.Q.*, 1927, no.I, vol.iii, p.748.

⁶ According to traditional accounts of the Ahoms, the present name Assam derives from 'Asama' in the sense of unequalled or peerless. Banikanta Kakati says *Asama* –peerless may be Sanskritised form. Thus, it is difficult to associate this Sanskrit derivative with the tribes conquered by the Ahom

The roots of the origin of most of the terms lie in its prevailing beliefs and practices. Scholars connect the term Pragjyotisha with astronomical significance of planetary worship or solar cult that prevailed in the region.⁷ It has been said that immediately after the ascendancy of Naraka, the name of the kingdom changed from Pragjyotisha to Kamarupa.⁸ According to the Brahmanical tradition, the term Kamarupa is derived from the myth of Kamadeva that is recorded in *Kalikapurana*.⁹ Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, however, re-interprets this Brahmanical myth and shows that the origin of this myth is associated with the Buddhist practices.¹⁰

Geographical location:

Assam is located in the south of the eastern Himalayas and is bordered on three sides with three international boundaries—Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. The kingdom was not included among the states of sixteen *Mahajanapadas* that flourished during Buddha's period. During Asoka's period, Kamarupa was a frontier kingdom of India in the east and had been continuing to the same till the period of Guptas. Most of the scholars while dealing with the geography of early Assam have treated the same region for the state of 'Pragjyotisha –Kamarupa'. The scholars even sometimes have used these two terms viz. the 'early Assam' and the 'Pragjyotisha –Kamarupa' as synonym.¹¹

The political boundaries of the region were varied according to her posterity. In different periods and under the rule of different rulers, this kingdom included

kings and conciliated by them. The word might have derived from *Ashan* i.e. the land of monks, which is corrupted to Shan. The word was given to Shans first and was later applied to the country and with the coming of the Shans; this region came to be known as Ashan or Asham. For details, see B.K.Kakati, *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, fifth edition, 1995, pp.2-3; B.N.Puri, *Studies in Early History of Kamrupa*, D.H.A.S, Guwahati 1968, p.21.

⁷ The topographical features of Pragjyotisha as described in the Puranas corresponded to a formation like 'Pagar-Juh-tic(c=ch), a region of extensive high hills. B.K.Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp.5- 6; K.L Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, op.cit., p.9.

⁸ For details, see B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p.28.

⁹ Kamadeva, the God of love- the Indian Cupid, was sent by the gods to put an end to Siva's mourning, due to the death of his consort. But he was burnt to ashes by the fiery glance of Siva, later recovered his original form (*rupa*). Thus, the name of the land came to be known as Kamarupa. For details, see K.L.Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, op.cit., p.7.

¹⁰ Vajrayanists performed a kind of practice that is known as '*Kaya Sadhana*'. By this practice, they destroyed desire and they gave a new form of this desire by *Cakra Sadhana*. For details, see Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, *Devi*, Sahitya Prakash, Guwahati, 1986, pp.182-183.

¹¹ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2010, p.39.

some parts of Himalayan region, areas of West Bengal, Bangladesh, and Tripura and maintained the links with both northern and southern part of India. Based on the epic, Pargiter is of the view that, ‘The kingdom included the greater portions of modern Assam along with Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Bogra, Mymensing, Dacca, Tripura, portions of Pabna and probably a portion of Nepal.’¹²

The territorial formation of the state of Pragjyotisha –Kamarupa during the period from the reign of Pushyavarman to the reign of Narayanvarman(c.518C.E.) was in rudimentary state as seen in the case of Ahom state formation in Assam in its initial two/three centuries (from the 13th to the mid of 16th century C.E..¹³ In the early period, the kingdom Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa was confined only to the areas of lower Assam i.e. the undivided Kamarup and Goalpara district of modern Assam.¹⁴ With the annexation of Davaka in the fifth century, the area had been remained intact as eastern boundary of Assam until the 8th and the 9th century C.E..¹⁵ The inscriptions assign to the 9th -10th century C.E., namely Tezpur grant and the Parvatiya plates of Vanamala, and the Nowgong grant of Balavarman suggest the extension of eastern limits to these areas.¹⁶ There are no any historical documents to show that the kingdom Pragjyotisha Kamarupa had any political influence in present upper Assam districts such as Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Sibsagar districts.¹⁷ The western boundary of the kingdom was mostly confined to the river Karatoya which is placed between Kamarupa and Pundravardhana.¹⁸ In the seventh century, after

¹² *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1887, p.106, as cited in S.L Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Monoharlal, New Delhi, third edition, 2003, p.74.

¹³ Nirode Boruah, ‘The Geography of Pragjyotisha–Kamarupa: A Study in Historiography’ *PNEIHA*, 29th session, Dibrugarh, 2008, p.77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁵ During the rule of Kalyanvarman (420C.E.-440C.E.) in 5th century, Kapili Valley or Davaka kingdom was absorbed within Kamarupa C.E. For details, see P.C.Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p.47.

¹⁶ P.C.Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, pp.40- 47; M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, Guwahati, 1978, pp. 82-89 &142-150.

¹⁷ Nirode Baruah, ‘The Geography of Pagjyotish-Kamarupa: A Study in Historigraphy’, *op.cit.*, p.82. N.B. H. N. Dutta shows that, Deopani in Sarupathar region of Doyang Dhansiri Valley was not within the ancient Kamarupa kingdom and the valley was ruled by an independent line of rulers. For details, see *History Art and Archaeology of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley Assam*, LBS ublication, Guwahati 201, pp. 038-033.

¹⁸ Pundravardhana was a part of early Kamarupa during the rule of Bhutibarman i.e. in the middle of 6th century C.E. H.K.Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, pp.66 &201;

defeating Sasanka, the ruler of Gauda by Bhaskarvarma (594C.E.-650C.E), Radha and Karnasuvarna became the parts of Kamarupa.¹⁹ It has believed that Purnavardhana was also a part of Assam.²⁰ However, the western political boundary of Kamarupa remained fluctuating considerably during the Pala rule. In the 8th -9th centuries the northern limits of the kingdom extended to the foots of the Himalayas and the eastern limits up to North Cachar and Mikir Hills region.²¹ After the fall of the Palas, a number of principalities, having independent status, emerged. However, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, the kingdom of Kamarupa extended from the Karatoya in the west to modern Darrang and Nagaon districts in the central Assam.²² Thus, the kingdom extended its boundary in different periods but largely it remained confined to the Brahmaputra valley.

Ethnological traits:

Assam is the homeland of different ethnological traits viz. Negritos, Austroloids, Mongoloids, Alpine, Indo- Aryan and Indo-Scythians.²³ Though Assam received a large variety of racial elements, it remained predominantly a land of the Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid trait. They were the earliest inhabitants of Assam who is known as Kiratas²⁴ and Cinas. They are also commonly designated as *Mlecchas* and *Asuras*.²⁵ Since 'Assam lies on one of the great migration routes of mankind', it experienced successive waves of migration from earliest period. Aryans migrated to the land in different phases. Alpines were the first group of Aryans who migrated to the land in earliest period.²⁶

P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.* p.43. For details, see Jayati Bhattacharya, *An early History of Northern Bengal*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2013, pp.36-37 &80-81.

¹⁹ M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p.55.

²⁰ For details, see Jayati Bhattacharya, *An early History of Northern Bengal*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

²¹ P.C.Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, pp.40- 47.

²² H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-II, Publication Board of Assam, Guwhati, 1992, p.35.

²³ For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol-1, *op.cit.*, pp.1-16.

²⁴ 'The Kirata was the generic name of the Mongoloid people' as cited in, K.L.Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p.2. ,

²⁵ B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), Bina Library, Guwahati, 4th edn. 2003,p. 5.

²⁶ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p.16.

Political condition of Assam during the period of study:

Policy and patronages:

The reconstruction of the early political history of Kamarupa up to the ascendancy of Varman dynasty is difficult due to the absence of adequate reliable sources and covering with myths and legends. The tradition that has been recorded in the epics and *Puranas* reveals that the earliest rulers of the region belonged to the Non- Aryan tribe such as *Danava* and *Asura*.²⁷ They were succeeded by semi-legendary ruler Naraka.²⁸ *Kalikapurana* tries to portray the ascendancy of mythical king Naraka as the sign of the beginning of the socio-religious transformation and the process of Aryanisation in the region.²⁹ Naraka is said to have settled the twice – born (*Dvija* or Brahmanas) people in early Kamarupa near the capital as he had driven the Kiratas as a part of his policy or as instruction given by Vishnu.³⁰

Political system of Assam was institutionalized with the ascendancy of Varmans in the 4th century C.E., who regarded themselves as the descendent of Naraka Bhagadatta. It was during the period of Gupta Pushyavarman founded a new line of kings and assumed the independent royal title, ‘*Maharajadhiraj*’.³¹ Pushyavarman was followed by Samudravarman, Balavarman and Narayanvarman. Varman rulers performed some practices that show the acceptance of their Hindu ideal of kingship.³² They are *Aswamedha* sacrifices³³ and issuing rent free land

²⁷ According to the legend, the political history of Assam before Naraka, was associated with Kirata chief. The first ruler is believed as Mahiranga Danava who was followed by a series of Mongoloid rulers like Hataka, Sambara, Ratna and Ghatakasura. For details, see B.K.Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), vol-I, *op.cit.*, p. 17; J.B.Bhattacharya, ‘*Bhauma-Naraka Legend and State Formation in Pragjyotisha Kamarupa*’, Shillong, 2004.

²⁸ Early mention of mythical king Naraka and Pragjyotisha found is reference in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Scholar holds the view that these were composed between the periods from 4th B.C. century to 4th century C.E.. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-81.

²⁹ *Kalikapurana* shows that Vishnu introduced new political and socio-religious order by establishing Naraka at the throne of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. According to the myth, Vishnu, the symbol of Brahmanical fold, introduced new political and socio-religious order by establishing Naraka at the throne at Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. B.K.Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 28-29.

³⁰ K.L.Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, pp.18-19; For other details see, B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 6&28-34.

³¹ Pusya Varman was contemporary and the subordinate ally of Samudragupta.

³² B.N. Puri, *Studies in Early History and Administration in Assam*, *op.cit.*, p.7.

³³ The Doobi grant makes the earliest reference to the performance of the *Aswamedha* sacrifice. For details see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, Monarhar, New Delhi, 1995, p. 43.

grants to Brahmanas.³⁴ This indicated the influence of Vedic or brahmanical institution in the region.

Bhaskarvarman (594-650 C.E.) was the greatest and the last monarch of the Varman dynasty and raised the importance of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa in north Indian politics. He made himself the master of eastern India defeating his rival Sasanka of Gauda. Bhaskaravarm was a Hindu by religion who is said to have revealed the light to the *Aryadharma* dispelling the darkness that had engulfed it and established an era of righteousness.³⁵ He had gifted the land-free grants to the learned Brahmanas.³⁶ Bhaskarvarman was a devotee of Siva. Both his records (The Doobi plate and the Nidhanpur plate) begin with the adoration to that deity. It has also been found mentioned in Bana's *Harshacharita* that Bhaskaravarman was a devotee of Siva from his childhood.³⁷ Though he was non Buddhist, he showed his respect to *sramana* and learned scholars. Bhaskarvarman hearing about the insight of the pilgrim through the Brahmanas sent an invitation to Hieun Tsang addressing Silabhadra of Nalanda University twice.³⁸ Accordingly, Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang visited the kingdom. Bhaskarvarma took part in the great Buddhist assembly organised by Harsha Vardhan at Kanauj and Prayag (Allahabad).³⁹ The biography of Hieun Tsang written by his disciple Saman Hwui Li shows that on the eve of his departures Bhaskarvarman addressed the pilgrim "If the Master is able to dwell in my dominions and receive my religious offerings, I will undertake to found

³⁴ The kings used to issue copper plate charters for revenue free lands to Brahmanas. The Doobi and Nidhanpur Grants of Bhaskarvarman reaffirmed the earlier grants of Bhutivarman H.K.Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, pp.100-111 & 307; Bhaskarvarman renewed landgrants by his grandfather Bhutivarman.

³⁵ 'The involvement of Bhaskarvarman in the process of Aryanisation is warranted by the epithet *Prakastaryadharmaloka*, i.e. 'one who has revealed the light of Aryan religion' in the Nidhanpur grant (l.37). H.K.Barpujari(ed.),*The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*,pp.177& 307; K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p.60.

³⁶ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, pp.110-111.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 306 & 314-315.

³⁸ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op. cit.*, p.49.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

one hundred monasteries on the Master's behalf."⁴⁰ It has been believed that Bhaskarvarman along with his ministers became lay members of Buddhism.⁴¹

The major dynasties that followed Varman were Salastambha and Palas respectively. Bhaskarvarman was followed by the 'Mleccha' lineage under Salastambha.⁴² It is considered that due to the following of non-Aryan way of life, the family of Salastambha has been subjected to some degree of social degradation and derogatory designation as 'Mleccha's. The term Mleccha means an outcaste or a very low man.⁴³ The name 'Salastambha' might have derived from *Salistambhasurta* of Mahayana form of Buddhism.⁴⁴ During the period of the early Salastambha rulers Buddhist Tantricism was well established in Kamarupa and was recognized as one of the four holy regions of Vajrayanist in India.⁴⁵ Early rulers of Salastambha lineage extended patronage to construct temple at the place of tantricism such as Kamakhya.⁴⁶ At that period, the capital of Kamarupa might have shifted to Harupeswara that might be located in the modern Sonitpur district of Assam.⁴⁷ Salastambha was followed by comparatively weaker rulers from 675 C.E. to 725 C.E.⁴⁸ The rule of Harsh or Harshavarma of this dynasty (c.725-750 C.E.) marked an era of prosperity and territorial expansion. In the middle of the 9th century C.E., two important rulers of Salastambha dynasty, Harjaravarman (c.815 C.E.-835 C.E.) and Vanamalavarman (c.835 C.E.-865 C.E.) ruled in Assam. Harjaravarman was a

⁴⁰Shaman Hwui Li, *Life of Hiuen Tsiang* Beal, Samuel (trans.), Kegan Paul, Truner & Co. London, 1914, pp. 187-188.

⁴¹ A.Walley, *The Real Tripitaka*, London, 1952, as cited in P.C.Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.91.

⁴² M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 161.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ *Salistambhasutra* is a Mahayana text of great antiquity that deals with Mantrayana diction of Mahayana path of Buddhism. *Salistambhasutra*, Reat Ross (tr.), *An Early Vedanta Philosophy*, part - 2, as cited in Hazima Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, first Indian edition, 1987, p.356; Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, Distributors Assam Book Depot, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati 2004, pp. 6 & 14.

⁴⁵ *Hevraja Tantra* which was compiled in 693 C.E. mentioned that Kamarupa is regarded as one of the four holy regions of Vajrayanist. For details, see D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas,' *J.R.A.S.B.*, vol xiv, no-1, 1948, p.12; Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p.46.

⁴⁶ The older temple at Kamakhya was constructed between the 7th to 8th century when Kamakhya was flourishing as a center of Buddhist Tantricism. P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 330 .

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

devotee of Siva and was follower of Hinduism and his coronation ceremony was performed according to Vedic rituals.⁴⁹ The successors of Harjaravarman i.e. Vanamala also followed Hinduism. His period witnessed the emergence of some new deities such as Hetuka- Sulin and Kamakhya-Kameswari⁵⁰ that were patronized by the rulers.⁵¹ Tantric practices also considerably developed in this period. The rulers of Kamarupa, who were followers of Hinduism, also extended patronage to Tantricism and the Tantric *Anji* sign was found expression in the commencement of the inscriptions of *Vanamalavarman* onwards.⁵² This tantricism made nearer to both religious systems Hinduism and Buddhism.

However, in this period, the autochthonous tutelary deities of Kamarupa underwent a process of Hinduisation the intensity and direction of which usually was directly influenced by the parallel rise of political authority. It has been argued that the cause behind the patronisation of these tribal tutelary deities as Hinduised one because of the royal 'nuclear areas' were surrounded by tribes on whose loyalty and military support they depended.⁵³ Between the tenth and eleventh centuries, Kamarupa had been ruled by Brahmapala dynasty who patronized Hinduism. The inscriptions of the rulers of this dynasty showed that they were followers of Saivism⁵⁴ and Vaisnavism.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p109 and H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p.176.

⁵⁰ It has been mentioned in the Tezpur Copper Plates Inscription of Vanamala (9th century), in line 10 -12 'at the top of which there is a residence of the illustrious god Kameswara and the goddess Mahagauri'. There is also mention of Mahagauri –Kamesvarayoh in the Guwakuchi Grant of Indrapala (c1071C.E.). M. M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.* pp. 104 & 112.

⁵¹ It is stated that Vanamalavarman (832C.E.-855 C.E) has rebuilt the dilapidated temple of Hetuka-Sulin H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, pp. 132-133.

⁵² The Tantric *anji* (Z) symbol has been found first time appeared in the Tezpur Copper Plate Grant of Vanamaladeva. That was followed in the successive periods, in the Prbatiya Copper Plate Grant of Vanamaladeva and Uttarbill Copper Plate of Balbarman III. For details, see Dimmeswar Sarma(ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1981, pp.148-149. Note: The *Anji* sign is connected with *Satcakras* (i.e. the mystic nerve centers) of the Tantras and probably stands as a symbolic representation of the *Kundalini* nerve which resembles a serpent. M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient*, *op.cit.*p.106.

⁵³ Gajendra Adhikary, *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and their Management*, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 2001, p.115.

⁵⁴ H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I,*op.cit.*pp.144-147&151;

⁵⁵ Dharmapala was a Vaisnavite. There is no any *mangala* verse addressed to Vishnu in the epigraphs prior to the third Copper Plate Grant of Dharmapala. H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *ibid.*, p.328.

Kamarupa rulers extended political patronage to different families to the Brahmans in Assam. It was the systematic policy of the rulers of Kamarupa to grant *agrahara* settlements for the Brahman as from the 6th century C.E. that are found recorded in the epigraphs.⁵⁶ This patronage helped in the increase of the influence of the Brahmanas in particular and ideas of Hinduism in general. Royal priests had been extended considerable influence in consecration ceremonies.⁵⁷ In course of time, the doctrine of Brahmanical *Sastra* (code of conduct and polity of Chanakya) influenced the administrative system.⁵⁸ Accordingly, Indrapala properly divided duties to four *Varnas* and *asramas* (*Samayavibhaktacaturvarnasramadhara*) of life.⁵⁹ The 12th century inscriptions of Assam are the testimonials of the extension of Brahmanical culture in the region.⁶⁰

From the days of Varmana rulers, the theory of the divine origin of kinship which was propounded by Manu was adopted by the rulers of Kamarupa who liked to compare themselves with the gods of the Hindu pantheon. The rulers of Varmana dynasty compared themselves with Hindu goddess like Vishnu, Indra that is manifested in the inscriptions.⁶¹ Similarly, Brahmapala was compared with Indra, Ratnapala with Rama and Krishna and Vaidyadeva with Varuna, Kubera and Brihaspati.⁶² N.N. Bhattacharya says, “Kings duties and rights, the issue of *sasanas*, the selection of ministers and officers, revenue administration various kinds of officials and administration of justice, diplomacy and other aspects, as we find in the

⁵⁶ Nidhanpur grant, Tezpur Parbatiya plates of Vanamalavarmadeva (9th century), Guwakuchi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapala. M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.*, pp. 53-63, 124 and pp.200-201.

⁵⁷ Hayunthal Copper Plate Grant, v.13-14. As cited in P. C. Choudhury, *Assam-Bengal Relations, op.cit.*p.109; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*,p.176.

⁵⁸ For details, see Pushpabhadra Copper plate Grant of Dharmapala, v.14; M. M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.*, p.271; D. Sarma(ed.), *Kamarupa Sasnawali, op.cit.*, pp.146 &167ff.

⁵⁹ Guwahati Grant of Indrapala, verse18, M.M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.*, p.187. N.B.The *Varnasramadharma* (four-fold stages of ascetic life of Brahmanas) illustrated in *Kalikapurana*, the Brahmanical work of the 10th -11th century.

⁶⁰ Vedic rites are found frequently referred in the 12th century inscriptions such as Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva(1142C.E), Puspabhadra copper plate (verse.1), Subhankarpataka copper Plate (verse 17). For details, see M. M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.* pp. 283-287 & 252 & 264.

⁶¹ The Doobi Grant shows that Pushyavarman was like the second Vishnu, Narayanvarman was the divine Cakrapani in human form, Bhutivarman was like Indra in power and fame and so was Susthivarman. For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India, op.cit.*, pp. 42-43.

⁶² For details, see N. N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India, op.cit.* p. 43.

inscriptions, accord very well with the principles suggested by Manu and Kautilya.”⁶³

Thus, the political institutions and administrative systems of most of the rulers of Kamarupa provided the infrastructure to develop an ideal Brahmanical religion. Despite the fact that most of the rulers of Kamarupa were followers of Hinduism, during the early Saltastambha rulers Kamarupa developed as a center of Buddhist tantricism. K.L. Barua believes that Ratnapala, the ruler of Kamarupa adherent of Vajrayana since then Kamarupa became a centre of Vajrayana. However, inscription of Pala rulers of Kamarupa does not speak. K. L. Baruah also thinks that some of the rulers of Kamarupa were initiated Vajrayana and in connection refers to the work dharma occurring the Puspabhadra grant of Dharmapala as an indication of Buddhism.⁶⁴ During the period of Turko-Afghan invasion, king Samudrapala extended patronage to Buddhist monks. The Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala (dated 1154 Saka, i.e. 1232C.E) mentions the existence of *satra* institution in Yogihati where rituals were performed. To quote:

*“Adityasama Srisamudrapalarajye PrabalaSabasikasatra
Sagunkriya Sanyasin bule Danapunye Saja Yogihati
Sak ish yanachakra murha vanati”*

Scholars are of the opinion that if *Savasika satra* means residential monastery, it might be possible that this was a monastery of the Buddhist Bhiksus practicing the esoteric Sadhanas of a tantric religion.⁶⁵

Political relationship:

The rulers of Kamarupa maintained diplomatic and cultural relationships with other parts of India and abroad. They maintained cordial relationships with Kashmir, Nepal, Tibet and China where Buddhism prevailed. In the fifth century (428C.E.) Kalyan Varman, the ruler of Kapili valley or Davaka kingdom sent a

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, pp.91-92.

⁶⁵ Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamarupasaranavali*, *op.cit.*, p. 159; P.C.Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 306.

diplomatic mission to China.⁶⁶ During the period of Bhaskarvarman, Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang visited the kingdom. Even after Hiuen-Tsang's return to China, Bhaskarvarman exchanged envoys with that country.⁶⁷ Bhaskarvarman was interested in Chinese Taoism. When the envoys of the Tang dynasty, LiYi Piao and Wang Hiuan Tse (643C.E.- 646C.E.) came to India, Bhaskarvarman, asked the former to send a Sanskrit translation of *Tao-Tohkin* (the bible of Taoism) in 644C.E. and a portrait of Lao-Tse. The work was translated with the help of Yuan Chwang and some Taoist teachers and was sent to Bhaskarvarman.⁶⁸ Bhaskarvarman also helped the Chinese mission headed by Wang- Hieun-Tse.⁶⁹

The cultural or political relation between Kamarupa and Kashmir were established through a matrimonial relation with Kamarupi princess Amritprabha and with Meghavahana, the ruler of Kashmir. As a sign of good relations with Tibet, Amritprabha was accompanied by her father's preceptor, a Tibetan Buddhist monk named Stunpa.⁷⁰ Harshadeva, the ruler of Assam during the eight century, maintained cordial relationship with Nepal through the matrimonial relation of his daughter Rajyamati with Jaydeva II, the king of Nepal. The Pasupati epigraph of Nepal records that Harsa conquered Gauda, Odra, Kosala and other lands.⁷¹ In the subsequent period, these conquests of Harshadeva facilitated commercial and cultural relations between the said lands.⁷² The Kamarupa rulers also maintained cordial relations with smaller neighbouring kingdoms.⁷³

⁶⁶ S.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., p.150.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁶⁸ P.C. Bagchi, *India and China*, p. 200f as cited in P.C. Chodhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, third edition (revised) 1987, p.356.

⁶⁹ After the death of Harsha, the throne was usurped by one Arjun. Arjun ill-treated Chinese Mission and so Wang- Hieun-Tse escaped to Nepal and sought the aid of the kings, Tibet and China. For details, see K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, op.cit., p. 60.

⁷⁰ S.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 150.

⁷¹ For details, see H. K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit. p. 127.

⁷² P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 274.

⁷³ Dobi Copper Plate Grant (v.37) refers that the defeated feudatory *rajas* bowed down to Sthitavarman. Like that, some rulers submitted to Harjara for peace and they bowed down to the rulers. The feudatories helped king in military campaigns, when such occasions arose and also appointed to posts in the central structure. For details, see P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, p.156.

Friendly political relationship with different countries promoted commerce, communication and exchange of ideas. Among the rulers of Kamarupa, two kings namely, Bhaskarvarman and Harshavarman took part in pan-Indian politics and attempted to claim suzerain in power against other Indian rulers.⁷⁴

Assam was marked by the warfare and relationship with Bengal in 11th and 12th century C.E. Gauda king Rampala conquered Kamarupa during the period of Jayapala (1075C.E.-1100C.E.) and appointed Tingyadeva as vassal king.⁷⁵ While Tingyadeva (c1110-1126C.E) rebelled against Rampala, he was subdued by Vaidyadeva (1126-1140C.E). After the decline of the power of Gauda king, Vaidyadeva became independent. Kamarupa was politically disintegrated after Vaidyadeva, or his immediate successors.

The 13th century Assam witnessed two major events, such as the series of invasion of Kamarupa from the west led by the Turko- Afghan rulers of Bengal and the foundation of a kingdom by the Ahoms. During this series of invasions in the 13th century, some rulers namely Prithu (1200-1229C.E.), Samudrapala and Sandhya ruled in Assam and they successfully defended these invasions. In 1257 Kamarupa obtained brilliant success against the invaders.⁷⁶ Accordingly, in the 13th century, while Bengal came under the rule of Turko-Afghan, Kamarupa could resist their aggression and remained free from their dominion.⁷⁷ At this time, the country east of Barnadi was under the rule of Sukapha (1228-1268 C.E.), the founder of Ahom dynasty in Assam, while the areas of the western parts of Assam such as Cooch Bihar, Goalpara and Kamarupa were under the chiefs of the Bodo, Koch and Mech tribes and BaroBhuyan.⁷⁸ According to R.M. Nath, the dethronement of the Pala rulers of Assam by the Palas of Bengal in the early part of the 12th century C.E, paved the way of penetration of Buddhist –Tantrics, Naths and Sahajiyas into this region.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ S.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 167.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁷⁶ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., pp. 170-171.

⁷⁷ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., pp. 133-134.

⁷⁸ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., pp.170-171.

⁷⁹ R.M.Nath, 'Kondoli and the Kadali kingdom', *J.A.R.S.*, vol. vii. no.1, p. 21.

Social condition:

The society of early Kamarupa was predominantly composed of non-Aryans. Most of the rulers of Kamarupa adopted Hindu ideals in their administration and introduced Aryan institutions that contributed to the new social formation. All the people of all races Mongoloid to Aryans, contributed to building up of the social fabric of Assam. There is record of early contact of Aryan culture with the land. Aryan culture was carried either by the Alpine or by the later Brahman.⁸⁰ Puranic traditions speak of the Sanskritisation of the Brahmaputra region was occurred in early days was with the ascendancy of Naraka.⁸¹ However, it has been suggested that Aryanisation or Sanskritisation of Kamarupa began not earlier than the fifth century and Aryanisation of Assam seems to have taken place by slow infiltration of Aryan ideas and the process was nearly completed in the valley of the Brahmaputra by 1200 C.E.⁸²

The process of Hinduisation in Assam was begun under the Kamarupa rulers when large numbers of Brahmins were patronized. Kamarupa rulers granted rent free lands grant to the migrant Brahmins from North India or Bengal who were responsible for the propagation of the Brahmanical culture in the land.⁸³ With the process of the land grants to the Brahmanas by the rulers of Kamarupa, even in the interior and tribal areas, Brahmanical culture and its various manifestations began to influence the political, public and religious life of Brahmaputra valley.⁸⁴ It led to the process of reorganization of society from primitive tribalism to Sanskritised social base.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ For details, see H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.

⁸¹ For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-40.

⁸² It has been suggested that the process of Aryanisation or Sanskritisation nearly completed in the valley of the Brahmaputra by 1200 C.E.. S. K. Chatterje *The place of Assam in the history and civilization of India*, Department of Publication, G.U, 1955, p.35; B.K.Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*,*op.cit.*,p.29; H.K.Barpujari(ed.),*The Comprehensive History of Assam*,vol-1,*op.cit.*,p.201.

⁸³ For details, see Gajendra Adhikary, *Religious Establishment of Studies in Their Socio-Economic Background of Assam*, Candra Prakash, Guwahati, 2006, p.23.

⁸⁴ For details see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*,p. 42.

⁸⁵ Manas Mazumdar, 'Reconstructing the Social Structure of Pragjyotish Kamarupa: Role of Varna Ideology', *PNEIHA*, 32nd Session, Tripura 2011, p. 82.

With the gradual propagation of Aryan culture, numerous Mongoloid tribes converted to Hinduism.⁸⁶ They accepted Hindu social code and were accorded with Sudra status.⁸⁷ Accordingly, by the eight–ninth century, the society of Kamarupa became distinctly divided into two broad divisions namely *Sudra* and *Dvija*(twice-born Brahmins).⁸⁸ References are found in both early Buddhist⁸⁹ and Brahmanical literatures about the existence of Brahmanas in Kamarupa.⁹⁰ Brahmanical literature also mentions a conflict between the newly settled Brahmins and original inhabitants of early Kamarupa in form of a myth.⁹¹

There is no any evidence that the Brahmanas of Assam followed their ideal practices or six fold duty⁹² till the period of Bhaskarvarman. However, in course of time, they performed Vedic practices.⁹³ Brahmanas enjoyed the favourable position in the society. It has been mentioned earlier in this dissertation that the rulers of Kamarupa bestowed land grants to Brahmanas along with certain privileges.⁹⁴ Some groups of Brahmaputra valley also got higher position in the society along with the Brahmanas. Brahmanas, Ganaka Daivaigyas and Kshatriyas of Brahmaputra valley

⁸⁶ For details, see H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, op.cit.*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

⁸⁷ The indigenous people were absorbed in Hinduism and accorded the status Sudra or peasants and they were required to produce surplus from their land. For details, see Nirode Baruah, 'Urbanization in Early Assam: A Study in Theoretical Aspects,' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 67th session, Farook College, Calicut University, 2006-2007, p. 167.

⁸⁸ Deopani image inscription. M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.*, pp. 307-309; H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

⁸⁹ The word '*Lauhitya Brahmanas*' or '*Lohicco Brahmanas* (in Pali) was found mentioned in *DighaNikay* (I.224) and *Samyutta Nikaya* (iv.117), as cited in H.K.Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, p.306; Taranatha also referred the existence of Brahmanas in Kamarupa during early centuries. For the details, see Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, p. 47.

⁹⁰ *Satapatha Brahmanas as cited* P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century AD, op.cit.*, p. 28.

⁹¹ According to mythology, Vasistha brought a *Sadhana* from Mahacina, but the events followed by which a clash occurred between Siva and his ally Tara and Ekjata with Vasistha and other twice born. It seems as a conflict between established orthodoxy and Brahmanism on the question of supremacy over the area of worship. Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Barua (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, Dutta Barua Publishing Company, Guwahati, 2007, ch 81. p.300.

⁹² The Sixfold duty is *Jnagya, yajana, adhyana, adhyapana, dana* and *pratigraha*. These contain performance of *Jnagya*, fire oblation, muttering of prayers in the morning at noon and in the evening and read of four *Veda* etc.

⁹³ For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, pp. 198-199.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-112 ; *supra*, 56.

adhered to 'orthodox' views propounded by Manu in some aspect.⁹⁵ The astrologers (Ganaka) were held in respect and they occupied the status of upper *Varna* in Assam contrary to Manu's injunction.⁹⁶ Kalitas constituted one of the large sections of the population in Assam.⁹⁷ Being excellent in agriculture they were gradually, included in the elite group which fulfilled the needs of the pre-urban / rural society. Koches and Kalitas were too some extent influenced by the Brahmanical and orthodox traditions.⁹⁸

One of the prominent groups of the population in the region was Kaivartas.⁹⁹ They possibly belonged to an aboriginal tribe settled in different parts of Bengal and Assam and gradually came under the influence of the Brahmanical culture.¹⁰⁰ Kaivartas were engaged in different profession related to river.¹⁰¹ Some Kaivartas also owned land and lived on agriculture. They were divided into two sections i.e., Halowa and Jalowa. Halowa were those who worked with ploughs and Jalowa worked as fishermen.¹⁰² The professional castes like Dandi (rowers of boats), Nauki (boatmen), Kumbhakara (potters) are sub-branch of Jalowa which is identical with 'Dom'.¹⁰³ Evidence suggests that some pieces of land were also assigned to them.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁹⁶ According to Manu, astrologers should exclude from *śradha* and practice of the pseudo-science by the ascetic should be forbidden. H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, p.213; P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century A.D*, *op.cit.*, p. 303.

⁹⁷ B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (early Period)*, *op.cit.*, pp. 124 – 130.

⁹⁸ J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 212; Kalitas are said to have originally followers of Buddhism, but later came to be known as 'Kulalupta' (conversion from the original clan or religion). Maheswar Neog(ed.), *Banikanta Rasanawali*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 4th edition, 2010, pp. 112-132; B.K.Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (early period)*, *op.cit.*, pp. 124-130; P.C Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

⁹⁹ Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjarvarma (830 C.E.) indicates that Kaivartas were so organized and powerful that they could even challenge the royal boats. The decision over the disputed issue had to be made through a process of conciliation. Royal officials, feudal lords, prominent Brahmanas had to intervene in the matter. For details, see M. M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp.81-85; B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, *Assam, op.cit.*, p. 130.

¹⁰⁰ Census Report, 1901, I, p. 132 as cited in H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. 1, *op.cit.* p. 215.

¹⁰¹ Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjarvarma (830C.E) mentions a Kaivartas was in charge of collecting state-tolls on the revenue. M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-85.

¹⁰² H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*p.215.

¹⁰³ The existence of the Dom and Candala in Kamarupa has found reference in the Tantric text *Mahacinacarakramana*. Dom were generally engaged to the profession related with river and boat, unlike the other parts of India where they were associated with funeral grounds.H.K. Barpujari (ed.),

The professional group Doms or the Kaivartas enjoyed sound socio-economic status but in the framework of *Varnasramadharama*, they were of low-grade.¹⁰⁵ Another indigenous community who lived in Brahmaputra Valley was known as Yogi or Katani.¹⁰⁶ Originally they were associated with different profession like drum – beating, palanquin bearing, quackery, snake-charming etc. During the Ahom rule, they were mainly associated with the rearing of pat silk worms and spinning of silk thread and they gradually become agriculturist.¹⁰⁷ It was during the period of Pala rulers of Kamarupa, the Yogi community was developed as a religious community. They came to be known as Nathas in later period.¹⁰⁸ The professional castes weavers (*Tantuvayas*) constituted the guild and enjoyed their autonomy in socio-economic field.¹⁰⁹ In the ninth century, the merchants also emerged as a powerful and respectable class in the society. They were in close touch with administrators as they participated in the coronation ceremony of the ruler.¹¹⁰ Thus, initially a pre-dominant non-Aryan society, in the course of time, partly transformed to a caste based hierarchical society.

The 12th century inscriptions of Assam reveal the extension of Brahmanical culture in the region.¹¹¹ It seems that large numbers of Hindu *Dharma sastras* (works of Hindu religion) were written in the region. Accordingly, Kamarupa

The Comprehensive History of Assam, vol-1, 215; P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, op.cit., p. 341 and M. M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 81-85.

¹⁰⁴ For details, see M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 265; H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-I, op.cit. p.148.

¹⁰⁵ Dom performed Buddhist rites and rituals until neo-Vaisnavite movement. Though, they were included in Hindu fold, after reforms led by neo-Vaisnavite saints Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, but they were looked down upon in Hindu society for their earlier religious embracement. Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parisad, Guwahati, 1972, pp.142- 143.

¹⁰⁶ D.Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *PNEIHA*, Dibrugarh, 2008, p.110.

¹⁰⁷ S.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., p.16.

¹⁰⁸ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', op.cit., pp.110-120.

¹⁰⁹ It has found mentioned in the Subhankara grants (line 54-55) of 12th century about the settlement of weavers. They might have constituted themselves like the guilds. P. C. Choudhury, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.163.

¹¹⁰ Hayunthal Copper Plate, vv.13-14 as cited P.C.Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.109.

¹¹¹ Vedic rites are frequently referened in the 12th century inscriptions such as, Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva (1142C.E.), Puspabhadra copper plate (verse.1), Subhankarpataka copper (verse.17) M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 252, 264 and 283-287; P.C.Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.190.

became a noted centre of Brahmanical learning.¹¹² The Gauhati Grant of Indrapala of the same period clearly reflects the classification of four classes of people (*Samayavibhakta-Caturvarnasramadhara*)¹¹³ which was initially mentioned in the two fold divisions of society namely, Brahmana and Sudra. Accordingly, the Brahmanical norms, laws and customs permeated in the different strata of society. However, outside the Brahmanical social system, some tribes followed their own customs. With the gradual footing of Brahmanical culture, *Vedas*, *Vedangas*, *Smriti*, including *Ayurveda* and *Arthasatra* got access (became popular among) to the higher stratum of society represented by the twice-born.¹¹⁴ The rulers of Kamarupa, particularly after the early Salastambha, extended patronage to Tantricism and King Indrapala was proficient in Tantra along with other branches of study.¹¹⁵

The Brahmins of Assam did not adopt the strictly orthodox habits with regard to dietary practices. They followed a flexible code of social conduct too. The customs such as endogamy untouchabilities were not followed as rigorously as in other parts of India.¹¹⁶

Trade and economy:

Agriculture was the prime occupation of early Assam that was introduced during the Neolithic period by Astro-Asiatic stock.¹¹⁷ The mode of cultivation was both *Jhuming* and shifting cultivation. Evidence suggest that irrigation was applied in their agricultural field in the sixth century C.E.¹¹⁸ The rulers of the Salalstambha

¹¹² Vedic rites are found reference in the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva (1142C.E.), Puspabhadra copper plate grants of Dharmapala verse.11, 1 Subhankarpataka Copper Plate Grants of Dharmapala (12th century). For details, see M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 252, 264 & 283-287; P. C Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve Century A.D.* op.cit., p. 104; *idem*, *Assam Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 190.

¹¹³ M. M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 183 & 187.

¹¹⁴ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit., pp. 286- 287.

¹¹⁵ For details, see Dimmeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, pp.148-149; M.M.Sharma, *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 187.

¹¹⁶ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol.-1, op.cit., p. 207; P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 191.

¹¹⁷ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Yuan Tsang recorded the irrigation system during his visit, as cited in P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 264; *idem*, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century AD*, op.cit., pp. 336-337.

dynasty exercised greater control over agricultural land, forest and waterways in Brahmaputra Valley.¹¹⁹ It was from the second half of the 9th century that the extensive cultivation developed in the region.

The main agricultural products of the region were rice, fruits bamboo and cane. The economic resources of Kamarupa and her various products led to the growth of both internal and external commerce. Some goods like *Tejpat* (malabothrum), dyes, silk, musk, ivory, gold etc. were exported to the other parts of India.¹²⁰ Silk was among the important commodities of trade that is referred in *Ramayana* and *Arthasastra*.¹²¹

The name of Suvarnakudya was mentioned in *Arthasastra* as a place where fine silk cloths were produced. The place identifies by scholar with Hajo that is situated in the district of Kamarupa.¹²² From the earliest period, Assam had been maintaining its trade contact with other parts of India and neighbouring countries such as China, Tibet, Bhutan Nepal and Burma that led to flourish some trade center within the region. *Arthasatra* of Kautilya, written at least substantially in the Maurya age, ranging from the last quarter of the 4th century B.C.E. to the first quarter of the 2nd century B.C.E, indicates the commercial contacts between the North- East and other parts of India or even with China. Thus, recorded history of external trade many have begun by sometime of this period.¹²³

Scholar suggests that Assam had been maintaining its trade contact with China from earliest period.¹²⁴ However, there was no any evidence to suggest that Assam had ever direct trade relations with the China during the period under review.

¹¹⁹ M.Momin, Urbanisation of Bramaputra Valley circa A.D. 600-1200, Jai Prakash Singh & Gautam Sengupta(eds.), *Archeology of NorthEastern India*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p. 267.

¹²⁰ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., pp.264-265.

¹²¹ *Ramayana*, *Kiskindha Kanda* 40, cited in P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.265; H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, p. 61.

¹²² P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 266; Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Datta Barua Second edition 1978. p.37; H. K.Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit., pp. 254-255; B.N.Mukherjee, *External Trade of Early North Eastern India*, B.N. Mukherjee, *External Trade of Early North Eastern India*, Har Ananda Publication, New Delhi, 1992, p. 29.

¹²³ B.N. Mukherjee, *External Trade of Early North Eastern India*, op.cit., p.12.

¹²⁴ The earliest reference to commercial relations between India and China through the Assam Burma routes is found in the accounts of Changkien (200 B.C.) as cited P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.272.

Of course, there are some passes or *duars*, by which the middleman continued the commercial relation with China.¹²⁵ There were numerous passes through Bhutan that led to Tibet. The Bhutias used to come by the Valley of Manas River via Tasgong and Dewangiri to Hajo where a fair was usually held. The Bhutanese exchanged lac, woolen, yak tails, gold-dust, salt horses and Chinese silk for Assam muga, silk, cotton cloth and dried.¹²⁶ There were also direct trade routes through the mountain passes of the north with Tibet, Nepal extending up to the borders of Kashmir.¹²⁷ *Tabkat-i- Nasiri* mentioned that there were as many as thirty-five passes between Assam and Tibet and through them horses were brought to the kingdom of Kamarupa.¹²⁸ The people in the Assam plain and the Hills lying along with northern border maintained steady trade contact with Tibet. The Tibetan traders entered the lower lands through different routes which opened on the duwars, or doors like Bijni and Chapaguri in the present Kamrup district and Burigoma in the Darrang.¹²⁹

The aspects of relationship between trade contact between Tibet and Assam through Arunachal Pradesh have been discussed in length by Amrendra Kr Thakur. Through his writings, it is also clear that economic contact contributed to the movement of people (traders and others) from one region to other. Not only had this economic relationship contributed to the migration of Buddhist monks to the areas in Arunachal Pradesh but also in Assam. Though in later period, Thakur shows the participation of Buddhist monks also in trade.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-III, Publication Board Assam, 1994, pp. 126-127; P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 274.

¹²⁶ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-III, *op.cit.*, pp. 125-27.

¹²⁷ D.Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

¹²⁸ N. N. Acharya, 'The Trade routes and means of transport in Ancient India with special reference to Assam' in D.C. Sircar (ed.), *Early Indian trade and Industry*, Center of advanced study in Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta, Lecture and Seminars, part-I, no-viii-A, 1972. p. 41; P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D*, *op.cit.*, pp. 356-357.

¹²⁹ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North- East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p. 89.

¹³⁰ For details, see A.K. Thakur, "Technology Aided Trade in Pre-Colonial Arunachal Pradesh", *Resarun*, vol. 36 (60th Year Special Issue, Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh), Itanagar, 2011-12, pp. 7-14; *idem.*, "Reconstruction of Surface Communication System in Arunachal Pradesh: An Archaeological Probe", in S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.) *Sources of History of Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2008, pp. 219-236; *idem.*, "Trade and Culture: Some Reflections on Pre-Colonial Arunachal Pradesh", in the *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 27th session at Goalpara in 2007, published Shillong, 2008, pp. 198-209 ; *idem.*, "Polity of Pre-Colonial Arunachal Pradesh: Interactions in Trade, Culture, State and

There were commercial contact of Assam with Bengal, Orissa and Magadha in the west by both land and water routes. The Brahmaputra largely facilitates commercial contact with the rest of India. The occupation of Karnasuvarna by Bhaskaravarman facilitated better trade relation between early Assam and Bengal.¹³¹ Vadakaguri,¹³² the riverine urban centre played an important role in the trade and commercial activities with various parts of Assam and India through the river Brahmaputra.¹³³ The traders 'carried their merchandise in large boats down the Brahmaputra and reached the sea after skirting round the Garo Hill. They crossed the sea and traded in seaports like Tamralipti'.¹³⁴

There was passage from Kamarupa to Indian mainland through Pundravardhana which was a neighbouring state or a part of early Assam. There were land routes between Kamarupa and Samatata-Tamralipti which were used by travelers and traders.¹³⁵ The commercial enterprises between Assam and the western region viz. Gauda, Kosala, Kalinga were also facilitated during the time of Harshadeva (8th century) and in the subsequent periods with the conquest of the said lands.¹³⁶ Pragjyotisha, Harupeswara, Kamrupanagara and Sri Durjaya on the bank of Brahmaputra were the centers of inter-state and international trade.¹³⁷ Accordingly, Durjayanagara became a meeting place of learned man (Buddha Guru etc).¹³⁸

Buddhism" in S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.) *Buddhism in North-East India*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 241-63; *idem.*, "Colonial and Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: The Monpas in Perspective", *Journal of Historical Research*, vol. XII, 2002, Department of History, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam, pp. 51-59; *idem.*, "Pattern of Pre-Colonial Trade and Polity Formations in Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of their Relationship" in the *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, (hereafter *PNEIHA*), Imphal Session, 2000 pp. 299-318.

¹³¹Nirode Baruah, 'Urbanization in Early Assam: A Study in Theoretical Aspects, *op.cit.*, p. 168.

¹³² 'The habitation of Vadokaguri (west Garo hill district, Meghalaya) existed more thousand years. Beginning with a modest settlement the establishment prospered slowly and became one of the biggest townships around, from 7th -8th century C.E., to the 13th -14th century C.E.' As cited in A.K. Sarma, 'Notes on the Terracottas of Bhaitabari (Garo Hills), *Journal of Assam research Society*, vol.xx, 1972, Guwahati, pp. 8-13.

¹³³ For details, see Nirode Baruah, 'Urbanization in Early Assam: A Study in Theoretical Aspects' *op.cit.*, pp. 168-169.

¹³⁴ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

¹³⁵ For details, see Jayati Bhattacharya, *An early History of Northern Bengal*, *op.cit.*, pp. 221-222.

¹³⁶ For details see, P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p.274.

¹³⁷ N. N. Acharya, 'The Trade routes and means of transport in Ancient India with special reference to Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 43; P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 353.

¹³⁸ B.K.Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), vol.I, *op.cit.*, p.83.

Based on the Hieuen Tsang reference, that there were number of people from other lands who had come to Bhaskravarman's capital in search of work, Nirode Baruah believes that probably some specialized functionaries and occupational groups came to sell their skill and wares in an urban centre.¹³⁹ There were also trade links of Kamarupa with the other parts of India such as Gurjara country, Kerala, Vahika and Tajika.¹⁴⁰ This commercial contact led to the development of craft center at Ambari that flourished approximately from seventh-eight centuries to twelfth century.¹⁴¹

Cultural and Religious practices:

The geographical position of Assam made it possible to become an area of interaction for the different groups of peoples from ancient times. There was early commercial network between Kamarupa and neighbouring land by which various social groups migrated to this land. Assam experienced successive waves of migration and settlement of the people of various cultural and religious backgrounds,¹⁴² this condition was conducive to the growth of a composite culture. In Assam, a social and cultural life had developed by its original inhabitants before the coming of the Aryans.

Aryan culture was carried either by the Alpines or by the later Brahmans around fifth century C.E.¹⁴³ Alpines were the first group of Aryans who migrated to the land.¹⁴⁴ Migration to the land continued even after. Among these mention may be made of the Kayasthas or Bara – Bhuiyas and Brahmins from Kanauj and Mithila. Two other streams that appeared on the scene in the 13th century were the Muslims from the west and Ahoms from the east.¹⁴⁵ All these diverse ethnic groups

¹³⁹ T. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India*, p. 186. For details, see Nirode Baruah, 'Urbanization in Early Assam: A Study in Theoretical Aspects' *op.cit.*, pp.166-167.

¹⁴⁰ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-I, *op.cit.*, pp. 245- 246.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 473-479.

¹⁴² J.C. Ghosh says that the follower of Buddhism migrated from Bengal and Bihar is of greater proportion than the Hindus. J.C. Ghosh, 'Buddhism in Kamrupa and Sylhet', *J.A.R.S.*, 1930, p. 48.

¹⁴³ For details see, H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁴⁴ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ N.N. Bhattacharya and M.Taher, 'Historical Geography of Assam in the early and Medieval period: A Perspective', *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Platinum Jubilee, 1992, p. 47.

contributed to the evolution of the religio-cultural traits in the region. In Assam, two distinct cultures viz Aryan culture and culture of the Mongoloid people were running side by side and in course of time, these two cultural streams influenced one another.¹⁴⁶

The roots of religious practices in Assam can be traced back to the non-Aryan or Pre-Aryan periods. Alpine and Tibeto-Burman elements complemented by animistic and fetichistic beliefs have laid the foundation of religious beliefs of early Assam. In course of time, various religious groups were modified to a great extent by a process of absorption and syncretism.¹⁴⁷ The original inhabitants i.e. non-Aryan people developed their religious practices centering round fertility cult and ancestor worship which often assumed the form of phallic worship and head –hunting.¹⁴⁸ The religious practices that performed by original inhabitants or Kirata people¹⁴⁹ are mentioned in *Yoginitantra* as *Kairatrajadharmas*.¹⁵⁰ They performed worship to mother Goddess in the form of *Yoni* (female genital organ) and gross form of Saivism in the form of *Linga* (phallic symbol), which had an easy association with flesh and wine.¹⁵¹

The Alpines had also developed solar cult practices in the region.¹⁵² As a part of the traditions of Vedic Aryans, some practices such as *Jnagya* and *Homa* came to occupy important position in the region.¹⁵³ Among other rites and rituals, *Tapas* or ascetic practices formed an important part of the religious life of the Brahmanas assigned to the temple.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ Dimmeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, op.cit., p. 144.

¹⁴⁷ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, op.cit., p. 97,

¹⁴⁸ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., pp. 302-305; P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 291; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother- Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ 'O queen of all Siddha (Uma), in the holy shrine of the Yogini (i.e. Kamarupa) the dharma (ritual or religion) is considered to be of Kirata origin. N.B: The Mongolian inhabitants are known as Kirata Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, 'Kirata Jana Krti', *J.R.A.S.B.*, vol.xvi, No.2, 1950, p. 157.

¹⁵⁰ 'Siddhesi Yogini-Pithe dharmas Kairatrajao Matahajdharmas'. Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (ed.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua Publishing Company, Guwahati, 1994, p. 506.

¹⁵¹ Gajendra Adhikary, *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, op.cit., p. 34 & 223.

¹⁵² P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, op.cit., pp. 291-2.

¹⁵³ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, pp. 307-312.

¹⁵⁴ Nagaon Copper Plate of Valavarman, v.27 as referred in Gajendra Adhikary, *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and their Management*, op.cit. p. 85.

Scholars are of the opinion that Brahmanical Hinduism developed in the region as early as the beginning of the fifth century C.E., and argue that the mention of the cave temple and the installation of the deity Balabhadra in Umacala inscription,¹⁵⁵ mention of religious asylum by *Avaguna (asrama)* and horse sacrifice in the Barganga rock inscription of Bhutibarman (6th century C.E) are the evidences of the development of Brahmanical religion.¹⁵⁶ Varmana rulers granted special *agrahara* (religious gift of land to Brahmanas) for the promotion of Vedic religion and scholarship.¹⁵⁷ The royal patronage of the of rulers helped in the spread of Brahmanism, more appropriately in popular term Hinduism and Puranic mythologies in early Assam.¹⁵⁸

Testimony of Hieun Tsang also provides the information about the existence of hundreds of Deva temples, evidently Brahmanical gods existed in Kamarupa during 7th century C.E.¹⁵⁹ Nirode Boruah says,

“The geographic provenance of the donated land to the Brahmanas by the early rulers of Assam show that through it covers a vast tract of land of present north-east and north Bengal of India and north Bangladesh, but it does not necessarily mean that the whole region was monopolized by the Brahmanical faiths. The systematic land grants to the Brahmanas had simply given birth to some

¹⁵⁵ It has mentioned in the Umacala inscription ‘This cave (temple) of illustrious lord Balabhadra has been constructed by Maharajadhiraja Sri Surendravarman’. M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.*, p. 2.

N.B: In Hinduism, Balabhadra is identified with Balarama, the brother of Krishna who represents agricultural and dairying. In *Sadhanamala* there are several Hindu gods were given independent forms as principal gods in *Sadhana*. A set of four Hindu deities under the Balabhadra group is described fully in the *Dharmadhatuvagiswara Mandala* of the *Nispannayogavali*. They include Bhalabhadra, Jayakara, Madhukara and vasanta, and in Hinduism, all these are the companies of the god Kamadeva, the deity of desire. However, Balarama alias Balbhadra is recognized as one of the minor deities in the *Kalika Purana* and there is no mention of independent worship of Balabhadra. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma KLM Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1958, p.378; Dharmeswar Chutiya, ‘The *Kalikapurana* on the iconography of siva and other deities’ *Bulletin of Directorate of Assam State Museum*, vol-xxx, p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, pp. 306-307.

¹⁵⁷ For details see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India op.cit.* p. 41.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁵⁹ T. Watters (eds.), *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India*, as cited in H.K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. 306.

pockets of Brahmanical culture which subsequently emerged as epicenters of Brahmanical religious beliefs.”¹⁶⁰

Hinduism of its major sectarian divisions such as Saivism, Sakism and Vaisnavism prevailed in early Assam. Besides these, three major cults of Hinduism, Jainism¹⁶¹ and Buddhism also prevailed in early Assam.

Siva worship was the most popular form of religion in early Assam.¹⁶² Siva was worshipped both in the forms of phallus¹⁶³ and human forms in the region. He was portrayed as the leader of aboriginal Kirata i.e. non-Aryan people who is in ‘gross form associated with wine and flesh’.¹⁶⁴ The mild form of Siva or Rudra also appears in the Nowgong plate of Balavarman.¹⁶⁵

Legends speak Bana who ruled the Tezpur region was a staunch devotee of Siva.¹⁶⁶ From the historical records it appears that all the principal royal dynasties of early Assam were inclined towards Siva worship.¹⁶⁷ There are considerable numbers of ruins of Siva temple, sculptures of Siva and Sivalinga (in forms of phallic, or iconic forms Siva, Uma- Maheswar) found in different parts of Assam that reflect the popularity of the Siva cult both in phallic and iconic forms.¹⁶⁸ According to local legend, the Surya Pahar bears one short of one lac Sivalingas. A.K.Sarma, on the basis of his exploration at Vadagokuri¹⁶⁹ comes to the conclusion that Saivism was

¹⁶⁰ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, op.cit.p. 98.

¹⁶¹ Jainism was also not unknown in early Assam. Few rock cut Jaina images of ninth century AD are found in the cave of Surya Pahar, the Confluence of three major religions namely, Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit.,pp.421-422.

¹⁶² B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p.10.

¹⁶³ According to the tradition, one king named Jalpeswara, introduced the Siva worship in Assam. For details, see B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp. 10-13.

¹⁶⁴ B.K.Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit.,p.16; Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, op.cit., p.153.

¹⁶⁵ Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, op.cit., p. 153.

¹⁶⁶ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, op.cit., p. 107.

¹⁶⁷ H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., p. 96; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, op.cit., pp. 97-121.

¹⁶⁹ Vadagokuri is located 235 K.M from Guwahati, 25km from Dhuburi after crossing Brahmaputra by steamer and 75 K.M from the district town of Tura.

the predominant religious faith in the region.¹⁷⁰ With the development of tantricism, the worship of Siva connected with Sakti and he has been invariably mentioned in ancient texts, when there is a mention of Devi worship. In course of time, Siva was also manifested as a part of Brahmanical deity Vishnu.¹⁷¹

As far the worship of Vishnu in early Assam is concerned, Puranic records mention that Vishnu installed Naraka to the throne of Kamarupa.¹⁷² References are also found in the early royal inscriptions of Assam about the various names of Krishna or Vishnu¹⁷³ but till the period of Puspabhadra grant of Dharmapala (first half of 12th century C.E.), the inscriptions begin with the salutation of Siva (*Mangalaverse*).¹⁷⁴

Vaisnavism was established in Assam at a time when Brahmanical culture made considerable progress, and as the evidence show¹⁷⁵ the worship of both Vishnu and his incarnations was prevalent in the land from early times. However, the Vedic deity Vishnu did not enjoy its popularity like Siva in Assam at least till the eleventh century C.E. Some of the ruling dynasties of Kamarupa regarded themselves as the descendents of Naraka, the son of Varaha incarnation of Vishnu.¹⁷⁶ The reference of the boar incarnation of Vishnu was found mentioned in a numbers of inscriptions that were issued by Balabarman, Ratnapala and Indrapala.¹⁷⁷ There are various

¹⁷⁰ A.K. Sarma, *Emergence of Early Culture in North-East India*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 41-42; Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, op.cit., p. 105..

¹⁷¹ The illustration of the combination of the Vaisnava and Saiva faith is expressed through Hari-Hara images that found at Urvasi which assign to the 9th and 10th century C.E. Such images also found in Deopani, north Guwahati. In the Guwahati Grant of Indrapala (1058 C.E) verse, 1 to 5, Pasupati or Siva is identified with Vishnu. For details, see *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., vol.1, pp. 358-359; M.M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 181-185.

¹⁷² B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp. 28-29.

¹⁷³ In the Doobi and Nidhanpur Grants, there is a reference of Vishnu as the holders of the wheel (Cakrabhrit) in Boar incarnation, for details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit. pp. 328-329.

¹⁷⁴ For details, see H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., vol.1, p. 330.

¹⁷⁵ Vishnu images in Assam outnumber those of other creeds. There are some early images of Vishnu from the 8th century onwards found in Mikirati, Nagaon, Deo Pani and Surya Pahar. For details, see H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., vol-1, pp.385-401.

¹⁷⁶ Yuan Chwang states that Bhaskarvarman as descendents of Narayandeva. T. Watters, T.W. Rhys Davids & S.W. Bushell (ed.), *'On Yuan Chwang's Travel in India*, London 1905, vol-II, p. 185. H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, pp. 87-93; B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp. 6 & 28-29.

¹⁷⁷ For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit., pp. 328-330; Gajendra Adhikary, *A History of the temples of Kamrup and their Management*, op.cit., p. 40.

images of Vishnu along with his incarnation¹⁷⁸ are found in the region that assigned to the 8th to the 12th century.¹⁷⁹ In successive periods, *Avatarvada* of Vishnu played a dominant role in incorporating various popular deities like other parts of India. Vishnu was not only accompanied with Siva, the popular deity of the region, but also with Buddhist tantric deity Hayagriva.¹⁸⁰

All these process of the development also attached with the development of tantricism. Tantric origin of Hayagriva is hinted by the fact that the god can be worshipped with vegetation offerings as well as fish and meat.¹⁸¹ Hari-Hara Stone Inscription dated 8th century shows that the *Anji* sign is also associated with Vishnu.¹⁸²

Traditionally, Kamarupa has been recognized as the principal tantric Sakta centre with its most celebrated center at Kamakhya.¹⁸³ Saktism is the cult of worshipping a female goddess as the supreme deity. Saktism sometime confused with Tantrism as Sakti worship plays a vital role in Tantricism.¹⁸⁴ Based on the Puranic literature, B.K. Kakati believes that the semi-legendary ruler Naraka initiated the Sakta cult in the region.¹⁸⁵ However, apart from the mythical royal association of Kamakhya with Naraka,¹⁸⁶ there is not even a veiled reference to

¹⁷⁸ Incarnation of Vishnu are generally Matsya (fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Varaha (Boaraha), Narasimha (Man-lion), Vamana (dwarf), Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Buddha and Kalki

¹⁷⁹ H.K.Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, pp. 396-401; Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, op.cit., p. 108.

¹⁸⁰ Bobby Das, *Hayagriva in Assam a brief Study*, PNEIHA, 31st Session, Tura, 2010, pp. 47-51.

¹⁸¹ Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva was worshipped with Tantric rituals with eight syllable, twelve syllable and eighteen syllable mantras. For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.III, Publication Board of Assam, 1994, p. 229; J.C Ghosh, Hayagriva worship In Assam, *J.A.R.S.*, vol- II, no-4, p. 48 and Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 38-40.

¹⁸² M.M. Sharma, *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 312.

¹⁸³ There were many other sites of Sakta worship in Assam, such as. UgraTara in Guwahati, the Copper Temple at Sadiya etc.

¹⁸⁴ H.K. Barpujari(ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1 op.cit., pp. 317-318; M.M.Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 104.

¹⁸⁵ B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 28.

¹⁸⁶ The word Naraka, associates with skull. Naraka is said to have been so named because immediately after his birth, he was placed on the skull (ka) of a man (Nara). The skull generally relates with the followers of tantricism and Kapalika faith. Thus, the description of Naraka in the literature seems that he was follower of another faith. P. C. Choudhury and P.J. Deka believe that Naraka was the follower of Buddhism. P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 294; Pranav Jyoti Deka *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 24. For other details, see B. K. Kakati, *The*

Mother Goddess or 'Devi' in the royal inscription till the ninth century C.E. The Hinduised deities Kameswara-Mahagauri and Mahagauri-Kameswara that are identified by scholars as Kamakhya at Nilachala, first time appeared in the royal inscriptions of 9th and 11th century.¹⁸⁷

In the earliest period, Austric and other early inhabitants of Assam worshipped the fissured stone that they personified as Devi at Nilachala.¹⁸⁸ The concept of Saktism is an amalgam of many elements drawn from various sources, such as non-Aryan (not excluding non-Indian), Aryan and aboriginal.¹⁸⁹ The Mahayana Buddhists have been associated with this place of worship of the aboriginal mother goddesses at Nilachala and have worshipped Buddhist Tara.¹⁹⁰ By the seventh century C.E, Kamakhya developed as one of the main centers among the four important Vajrayana centers mentioned in *Hevajra Tantra*.¹⁹¹ In course of time, there evolved Hinduise Tantric deity Kamakya. It has been said by the scholars that the root of the origin of Kamakhya lies in Buddhism i.e. Buddhist tantricism.¹⁹²

Mother Goddess Kamakhya, pp. 16-17; Cintaharan Chakravarty, 'Antiquity of Tantricism', *I. H. Q.*, vol.vi, no. 1 & 2, 1930, p. 126.

¹⁸⁷ The deity Kameswara-Mahagauri first time appeared in the 9th century Tezpur Copper Plates of inscription of Vanamala (line 10 -12). Later in the Guwakuchi grant of Indrapala (the line 49) of 11th century (c.1071 C.E) also found mentioned about Mahagauri-Kamesvarayoh. M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, pp. 104, 112 and 202.

¹⁸⁸ The name of Kamakhya and the mode of its worship originated from Austric and other aboriginal cult that represented by the phallic representation of *Yoni*, i.e. object of worship of some primitive tribes. For details, see B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 16 & 34-40; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol. I., *op.cit.*, pp. 318-319.

¹⁸⁹ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, p. 366.

¹⁹⁰ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* vol-III. Trivandrum Sanskrit series, no.lxxxiv, 1925,p.648;P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*,p.303; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁹¹ It has been found mentioned in *Hevajra Tantra*, the Buddhist work assigned shortly before 693 C.E., Kamakhya as one of the main centers of Vajrayana along with other three important Vajrayana centers situated in Assam and Eastern India. Other three centers are Jalandhara, Oddiyana, Purnagiri and Kamarupa.G.W. Farrow and I. Menon '*The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra With the Commentrary Yogaratnamala* Motilall Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, reprint, Delhi, 2001; B. Bhattacharya 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *I.H.Q.*, vol.iii, no.1,1927, pp.733-746; D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pihtas', *Journal of the Royal the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.xiv., no-1, 1948, p. 12.

¹⁹² The seed incarnation of the *Tantra* for the goddess Kamakhya is addressed to Vajra-Yogini, VajraVarahi, Vajra-Vairocini who later became closely associated with the Sakti in form of Chinnamasta and Buoudha ChinnaChamunda. The goddess Kamakhya is a combination of Hindu goddess of Rajeswari, Candi, camunda, Sodasi, Tripura Sundari and Buddhist deities Vajradhatvisvari Marici, Vajravarahi, Vajravairocini and Tara Kurukkulla. Thus, Kamakhya is Hindu goddess but her roots lie in the Boudha vajrayana Tantricism. For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.* pp. 3, 14, 23 & 43.

Kalikapurana, the Brahmanical work of tenth or eleventh century, gave a new shape to the deity by portraying it as pan-Indian Brahmanical mother goddess.¹⁹³ In course of time, Saktism gained greater predominance in Kamarupa. In successive periods, various manifestation of Brahmanical mother goddess such as Mahakali, Uma-Maheswari, Tripura Bhairavi and Mahishasurmardini is found in different parts of Assam.

Apart from all the three major sectarian divisions of Brahmanism in Assam, there are various literary and iconographic references to the worship of Surya.¹⁹⁴ The Sun worship has been prevailing in Assam from the very early period.¹⁹⁵ *Sankhayana Grihasmgra* refers to the prevalence of the worship of sun in early Assam, which is of Alpine-Iranian origin.¹⁹⁶ The *Varaha Purana* mentions Udayacala –another name of Pragjyotisha –in connection with Sun worship and the *Markandeya Purana* contains indirect allusion to Kamarupa’s special association with sun worship.¹⁹⁷ Scholar identifies Surya Pahar in Goalpara as the perpetual abode of sun worship or ‘*Ravikhsetra*’ that has been mentioned in *Kalikapurana*.¹⁹⁸ The sites of Surya Pahar, Narakasura Hills and Sualkuchi contain specimens of Sun images belonging to circa eight-ninth centuries.¹⁹⁹

Various deities who enjoyed equal importance both in Hinduism and Buddhism namely, Indra, Dikpala, Kubera, Saraswati, Ganesha, Kartikeya, Balabharda, and *Hayagriva* etc²⁰⁰ also were worshipped in Kamarupa. However, the images generally identified as Brahmanical one without emphasizing on any

¹⁹³ With the development of Puranic trends in Kamarupa some local independent female deities such as Kali, Karali, and Chamunda came to be regarded as the manifestations of the great Mother Goddess. B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p.64.

¹⁹⁴ For details, see H.K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, pp. 411-417.

¹⁹⁵ For details see Bijoy Kumar Sarkar ‘Iconography of a Few Seated Surya-Images from Assam: A Critical Study’ *Proceeding of 31st session of North-East India History Association*, pp. 31-37.

¹⁹⁶ Sankhyayana Grihasangraha, as referred by P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, third edition (revised), 1987, p. 406.

¹⁹⁷ For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, op.cit., p. 63.

¹⁹⁸ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit., vol-1, p. 324.

¹⁹⁹ For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, op.cit., p. 63; H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit., vol-1, pp. 401-409.

²⁰⁰ For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma KLM Calcutta, Second edition, 1958.

sectarian identity.²⁰¹ Archaeological finds in Narakasur hills in Guwahati shows that during first quarter of the 8th century, a temple complex was built which was dedicated to number of deities Tara, Manasa, Ganesa, Indra etc.²⁰²

A remarkable shift in the religious nature of the region took place with the development of Tantricism that was marked by the assimilation of the Brahmanical Sakti-Tantricism with the Buddhist tantric form.²⁰³ Tantricism crept in to major divisions of Hinduism namely, Saivism, Saktism and Vaisnavism and became popular and is even reflected in royal inscription.²⁰⁴ The religious thoughts of Austric and Tibeto-Burmans later spread in the different religious systems through tantricism.

Before the development of Hindu Tantric practices in Assam, the name of Kamarupa had been mentioned in Buddhist Tantric works as a famous seat of Buddhist tantricism (Vajrayana). It has been said that Buddhist tantricism contributed to the evolution of the prime Tantric deity of the region i.e. Kamakhya.²⁰⁵ Thus, to understand the religio-cultural history of Kamarupa, it is important to discuss the evolution and development of Buddhism in early Assam.

Since Kamarupa was an area of the interaction of the people from different cultural traits, groups of Buddhists also came to the region. In the early centuries of the Common Era, the groups of Buddhists penetrated into Assam from its western boundary.²⁰⁶ The late period also saw the migration of a number of Buddhist tribes from Burma to the borders of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), vol-I, *op.cit.*, p. 176; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, pp. 323-327.

²⁰² P. C. Choudhury, 'Archaeological finds in Narakasur Hill,' *J.A.R.S.*, vol. xvi, p. 59; R.D. Choudhary and D. Chutiya, 'A Note on the Archaeological finds in Narakasur Hill, *J.A.R.S.*, vol.xix, pp. 23-34.

²⁰³ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

²⁰⁴ King Indrapala was proficient in Tantra along with other branches of study. M.M. Sarma *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 187. For details, see, Dimmeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, *op.cit.*, pp. 148-149

²⁰⁵ For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 4, 14-23 & 43-46.

²⁰⁶ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol-xxix, 2004-2006, p. 206.

²⁰⁷ The tribes such as Monpas, Shedrukpens, Membas and Khambas attached to Vajrayana tradition while Khamtis and Singphos belong to Hinayana or Theravada tradition. Maheswar Neog, *Religion of North East*, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-104; N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-138.

Before the development of the Brahmanical religion in Kamarupa, Buddhism had its contact with its inhabitant.²⁰⁸ In the first few centuries of the Common Era, a section of Buddhists performed their practices by constructing stupas in Goalpara area.²⁰⁹ They performed their rites in the religious places that had already developed as the sacred place of the non-Aryan or Alpine inhabitant. Since the early period, this place has been associated with the Sun worship, which was introduced, by Alpine group of people.²¹⁰ Buddhist group also associated at Nilachala, the sacred place of non-Aryan people of the region before the development of Brahmanical mother Goddess. They performed there worship to Tara, the deity and the place became the famous seat of Vajrayana form or Tantric form of Buddhism by the 7th century C.E.²¹¹ Buddhism after penetrating in Assam responded to its cultural landscape. In the successive periods, Buddhism found expression in three ways of mystic practices in early Assam; they are Vajrayana, Kalachakrayana and Sahajayana. Buddhism was accepted by the people belonging to the lower strata of society of the *Varna* based brahmanical social order in Assam.²¹² Buddhist Tantricism had dominated different places of early Assam.

Buddhists of Tibet and Bhutan regarded *Hayagriva –Madhava* temple as one of the sacred places of worship and still visit the place.²¹³ Even, the sanctity of Hajo is shown by the fact that the first monastery at Tibet was built with the clods of earth from Hajo.²¹⁴ Inside the temple, the installed image which is called Hayagriva–Madhava also is considered by the Buddhist Lama from Bhutan and Tibet as

²⁰⁸ In the words of N.D. Choudhary, 'No sculptures of Brahmanical religion (Saivism Vaisnavism and Saktism) have been found in Assam earlier than 5th -6th century A.D., which can also be taken as an indirect proof that a large section of people of Assam accepted Buddhism and continued it till 4th - 5th A.D.'. Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

²⁰⁹ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, 1990, p. 429; Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,' *op.cit.*, p. 204.

²¹⁰ The Sun worship was very ancient practice of the land that referred in *Sankhayana Grihasmgraha*. The place of Sun worship or 'Ravikshetra', mentioned in *Kalikapurana* is identified with Suryapahar. H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, p. 324; P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 406; *idem*, *Assam-Bengal Relation*, *op.cit.*, p. 296.

²¹¹ For details, see D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, p. 12; B. Bhattacharya, 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *I.H.Q.*, vol.III, no.1, 1927, pp. 733-746.

²¹² Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1972, p. 142.

²¹³ For details, see Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study,' *op.cit.*, pp. 47-51.

²¹⁴ Maheswar Neog, *Religion of the North- East*, *op.cit.*, pp. 36-37.

Mahamuni.²¹⁵ Many sites surrounding Hajo were associated with Buddhist faith and belief including the images.²¹⁶ Hayagriva in Assam associated with Buddhist tantricism much earlier than *Kalikapurana*.²¹⁷ In succeeding period, the Hayagriva of Assam, which was associated with tantric Buddhism was included as an incarnation of Vishnu in succeeding period²¹⁸ but retained its tantric mode of worship.²¹⁹ The work of 16th century, i.e. *Yogini Tantra* even prescribed meat of buffalo, fish among various other offerings in worshipping Hayagriva like a tantric deity.²²⁰

The Goalpara region had also witnessed the development of the tantric form of Buddhism in the later part of Pala period.²²¹ Buddhism of its later aspect i.e. Tantricism was strong cultural trend during the development of pre- Puranic and Puranic Hinduism in Kamarupa. In the subsequent periods, with the ascendancy of Brahmanical trends, Puranic Hinduism overshadowed Buddhism. Buddhism assimilated with Hinduism but some of the ritualistic practices are still visible in religious sphere of Assam as crypto-Buddhist practice.²²² This development had far-reaching impact on the socio-religious life and exerted influences in rites, rituals, language, literature and art, i.e. all strata of cultural life of Assam.²²³

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²¹⁶ L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, Allen & Co. London, 1895, p. 310.

²¹⁷ Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study', *op.cit.*, pp. 47-51.

²¹⁸ Hayagriva is mentioned as one of the incarnation of Vishnu in the neo-Vaisnava literature in Assam. Mahapurusa Sankardeva added 'Hayagriva' 'Dhruva' and Hari with other 21 incarnations mentions in Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev, Narayan Chandra Goswami, (ed) '*Bhagavat Purana Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha*', Students stores, Guwahati, second edition 2001, p. 9; Nabin Chandra Sarmah, *Purani Asomiya Sahityar Subas*, Bani Prakash, Guwahati, 1988, p. 207.

²¹⁹ Tantric rituals also influenced the Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva, who was worshipped with Tantric rituals eight syllables, twelve syllables and eighteen syllables mantras. H.K. Barpujar (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, p. 332; J.C Ghosh, 'Hayagriva worship In Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 48; for details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 38-40; Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study', *op.cit.*, pp. 47-51.

²²⁰ Suren Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati, 1994, pp. 550-551; Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

²²¹ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 119; Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Dutta Barua (2nd edition), 1978, p. 47.

²²² Maheswar Neog, *Religion of North East*, *op.cit.*

²²³ S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', *I.H.Q Indian* -1, vol-iii, pp. 747-756.

ii. Review of Literature

The socio-cultural history of Assam is dominated by a good number of works on various aspects of Brahmanical religious sects especially on neo-Vaishnavism. However, the aspects of the origin, various forms and the impact of Buddhism have not yet been comprehensively dealt with. The works are limited to the information of the early existence of Buddhism without appropriate interpretation of theoretical formulations. The socio-cultural history of pre-Ahom Assam has so far been reconstructed primarily from Brahmanical sources. The historians have paid less attention to the Buddhist sources in undertaking the research, whether in Assam or India as a whole.

It is also to state that the tantric Buddhist tradition which is a long dead practice and is not surviving as a living tradition has been paid less attention. It is further important to mention that the writers on Buddhism in India during colonial period have chiefly focused either on the life of the Buddha or his philosophy²²⁴ or with the early form Buddhism in India.²²⁵ In this Buddhological historiography scholars generally assess the importance of the role of Sangha, monastery, ethical principles of early Buddhism without offering much analysis to Mahayana and Vajrayana and the non-institutional Buddhist Siddhas traditions which have taken a form somewhat different from its earlier tradition.

Monier Williams²²⁶ surveys Buddhism from its earliest origin and its developments in different places of India as well as other Asiatic countries and observes the development and changes of Buddhism in different countries and in different environment. Though he observes the drastic change of Buddhism in India after the fifth century C.E. but he only briefly focuses upon Northern Buddhism.

²²⁴ Benimadhab Barua '*Prolegomena to a History of Buddhist Philosophy*' 1918, second edition, 1974, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi; William Montgomery McGovern, *A Manual of Buddhist philosophy*, vol.1, Kegan Paul, Trubner, New York, 1923; T.W. Rhys Davids, *Early Buddhism*, Archibald Constable & co, 1908; W. Woodville Rockhill, *The Life of The Buddha and the Early History of His Order*, Trubner & co, Ludgate Hill, London, 1884; Elizabeth Reed, *Primitive Buddhism Its Origin and Teachings*, Scott, Foresman & co Chicago, 1896.

²²⁵ T. W Rhys Davids, *Origin and Growth of Religion As illustrated by some points in the History of Indian Buddhism*, New York, G.P. Putnam's sons, 1882; *idem.*, *Buddhist India*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1911.

²²⁶ Monier Williams, *Buddhism (In connection with Brahmanism and Hinduism and its contrast with Christianity)*, London, John Murray Albermarle Street, 1889.

Ernest J. Eittel sketches Buddhism in different aspects; as an event in history, as a system of doctrine, and as a popular religion and deals with various Schools that developed in Ceylon, China and Tibet. He also observes²²⁷:

‘The religious systems of Northern Buddhism, as carried out in practical life by the Buddhists of Cashmere, Nepal, and all countries North and North-East of the Himalaya, will strike any observer at first sight as a most heterogeneous mixture of foreign, especially Indian, and native elements, embodying the mythological deities of almost any religion that ever existed in Eastern Asia.’

In the assessment of these early European scholars, Tibetan and other tantric traditions of Northern Buddhism were dismissed as degenerations from this ideal and denigrated with the label ‘Lamaism.’²²⁸ According to Maurice Winternitz, Pala-the Pala-period texts presented an unsavory mixture of mysticism, occult pseudo-science, magic and erotics.²²⁹ The Indian scholar on Buddhism, Binoytosh Bhattacharyya also opines that the texts of the Vajrayana are ‘specimens of the worst immorality and sin.’²³⁰ Such views might have retarded the historical study of Buddhism in Assam.

In succeeding periods, scholars such as David Snellgrove²³¹ and Alex Wayman²³² have provided valuable accounts of Buddhist tantric traditions, practiced in Tibet and other Himalayan regions in India. A number of works also survey the

²²⁷ Ernest J. Eittel, *Buddhism: Its Theoretical and Popular Aspects*, Crawford & com., Hongkong, 1884, p. 106.

²²⁸ Catherine Newell, ‘Approaches to the Study of Buddhism’, in Bryan S. Turner, (ed.), *The Sociology of Religion*, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex, United Kingdom, 2010, pp. 388-406; Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 15–45.

²²⁹ Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. 2, University of Calcutta, 1933, p. 389; G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, Oxford University press, London, 1938, pp. 278-279.

²³⁰ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya (ed.), *Sadhanamaal*, 2 vols., Gaekwad's Oriental Series, nos. 26 & 41. Baroda Oriental Institute, 1929, p. xxi.

²³¹ D.L. Snellgrove, *The Hevraja Tantra: A Critical Study*, Oxford University Press, London, 1959.

²³² Alex Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamajatantra: The Arcane Lore of Forty Verses*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1977.

entire development of Buddhism in India²³³ as well as later aspects of Mahayana Buddhism and Tantricism both in different perspective.²³⁴ The works of Indian authors deal with Buddhist tantric traditions in India, its origin development and contribution in Indian culture.²³⁵

Scholars, who deal with religion, have also examined the relationship between religion and philosophical formulations against the backdrop of socio-economic settings.²³⁶ Accordingly, the emergence of Buddhism has been studied in the context of the socio-economic milieu, i.e. the emerging agrarian order and urbanization in early India.²³⁷ In the researches on ancient Indian history during the

²³³ Akira Hirakawa *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1993; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1987.

²³⁴ Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, first Indian edition, 2008; G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra*, Motilal Banarsidass Delhi, 1992 (1st edn.) reprint, Delhi, 2001 Motilal Banarsidass; D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: A study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981; Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol.II, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962; Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, Concept Publishing, Company, New Delhi, 2009.

²³⁵ P.C Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantras', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, The Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, 1956, vol-iv, pp. 212-213; *idem.*, 'On foreign elements in the Tantra', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol.vii, no-1, 1931, Swami Pratyagatmanada, 'Tantra as a way of realization', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv; Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1949 (1st edn.), reprint 1995 Calcutta, Firma KLM; Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1967; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, p. 264; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic, and Philosophical Study*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1982; Chintaharan Chakravarty, 'Antiquity of Tantricism', *I.H.Q.*, March 1930, pp. 212-213.

²³⁶ For details, see William Ramp, 'Durkheim and After Religion, Culture, and Politics' in Bryan S. Turner (ed.). *The Sociology of Religion*, John Wiley & Sons West Sussex, United Kingdom, second edition 2010, pp. 52-75; Max Weber, Talcott Parsons (trans.), *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scribners Sons, New York, 1958. Romila Thapar, *A History of Ancient India*, vol.1, Penguin, New Delhi, 1966; *idem.*, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Orient, New Delhi, 1978; R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1968 ; D.D Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and other Writings*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002; R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005; Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007.

²³⁷ The large scale implementation of iron is instrumental for the extension of agriculture in the 7th - 6th century B.C. that resulted into the surplus production and it contributed to the growth of urban society in the Gangetic plains. Thus, the period was marked by the rise of urbanism and a new mercantile community, i.e. new forms of social and economic relations built around trade and agriculture. Buddhism seems to be a body of thought responding to the ideological sustenance of urban norms and values. For details, see D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990; Uma Chakravarty, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1996; V. K. Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 2006; D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1959; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India*,

post independence period, starting from D.D. Kosambi to R.S. Sharma and after the model of economic determinism developed and historians and other scholars started analyzing even various aspects of Buddhism from this perspective. Even in the case of north east India Amrendra Kr. Thakur and others have analysed Buddhism from this perspective.²³⁸

The development of Mahayana and Tantric form of Buddhism which occurred several centuries later than the emergence of Buddhism in India, is studied with different socio-economic changes in India.²³⁹ A.K. Warder observes that the practices of Buddhism underwent changes in the feudalised structure of the society. Accordingly, Buddha came to be portrayed as ‘superhuman’ or as ‘benevolent’ as lord in social and psychological terms. R.S.Sharma associated tantricism with feudal structure of the society which emphasized the feudal order with erotic practices.²⁴⁰ He is of the view that sexual rites which formed an important part in the agricultural rituals of tribal people was seized by the members of leisured upper classes and distorted to provide them sensual gratification.

Ronald M. Davidson in his *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*²⁴¹ deals with the background of Buddhist esoterism as a response to the different socio-cultural conditions of India, especially of the post- Gupta period. Buddhists lost its patronage from guild in the contested domain of the political and military life of India that occurred particularly in the North. The Buddhists facing challenges from all sides started to adjust to the pressure of its environments and responded to by

Challenging Brahmanism and Caste, Sage, New Delhi, 2003; D. N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar Publisher, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 65-73; K. M. Shrimali, *The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution c. 700-c.350 BC*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2007.

²³⁸ For details, see B. Tripathy & S. Dutta (eds.), *Buddhism in North- East India*, Indus Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006.

²³⁹ For details, see A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008. Some other scholars have also studied Buddhism and have tried to establish relationship between social formations and changes in the forms of Buddhism. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, 1984, p.148; Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Making of early Medieval India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994.

²⁴⁰ R.S. Sharma, ‘Material Milieu of Tantricism’, in *idem.*, (ed.), *Indian Society Historical Probing* People Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 188-189.

²⁴¹ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; *idem*, *Renaissance* Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, first Indian edition, 2008; *idem*, *Tibetan Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 371.

appropriating themselves to the socio-political condition of India.²⁴² This response found expression in the *mandalas* (circle of deities) of esoteric Buddhism like the political structure of early-medieval India (power /position of king and vassals). He advances this discussion by outlining the nature of the development in pan-Indian framework. Basing different early medieval Buddhist works he also observes the expression of Buddhist practices in the Brahmanical literature in Assam.

G.W. Farrow and I. Menon look the differences between the spiritual and social values of the Western nations and India and comment “Throughout its history in India, Buddhism had to compete with and was influenced by and in turn influenced the other indigenous religions. In India, the various social situations found in tribal/village and urban contexts were influential in the evolvement of the Buddhist tantric tradition found there.”²⁴³ Similar phenomenon has been observed in the case of Assam and the work has proved quite helpful in the preparation of the monograph.

Buddhism in Assam remained a neglected field of study among the scholars working on Buddhism in India. Writers on Buddhism generally laid emphasis only on the Buddhism in northern India where major dynasties ruled and patronized Buddhism. In the process they tended to ignore the histories of the other areas in the sub continent. In the major works dealing with Buddhism in India Assam only occurred in the context of an area where tantricism had developed and a place of association of Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas activities.²⁴⁴

²⁴² During the post- Gupta period India witnessed the new fluid politics of samanta feudalism. With the loss of patronage from trading guild at that period Buddhist groups searched for new kinds of patronage and placed monasteries in the position of assuming many of the characteristics of the society around them. They gained stature as landed feudal lords, collectin grants and taxes and exercised judicial powers in their domains. As a result, the monasteries began to internalize many of the same value systems that the external society reflected. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 111-112 & 133; *idem.* ,*Tibetan Renaissance*, op.cit., p. 371.

²⁴³ G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra*, op.cit., p.xv.

²⁴⁴ P.C Bagchi, ‘On foreign elements in the Tantra’ *Indian Historical Quterly*, vol.vii, no- I, March , 1931; S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious*, Firma KLM Calcutta,1949(1st edn.) reprint 1995 Firma KLM; D.C.Sircar, ‘The Sakta Pihas’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.xiv, no.1,1948; Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, op.cit.

There is no mention of Assam either in P.V. Bapat's book, *2500 years of Buddhism*²⁴⁵ or in Gail Omvedt's book, *Buddhism in India*.²⁴⁶ These two may be taken as representative of the general studies on Buddhism in India which have ignored Assam. But it has to be admitted that although the works do not deal directly with Assam, their insights into and formulations on the study of Buddhism have broad-based relevance and have proved useful in this monograph. To trace the development of that process in regional concept some works give valuable insight.²⁴⁷

Some works on Buddhism in north east India²⁴⁸ deal with Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh and its impacts on culture. N.Sarkar deals with how Mahayana Buddhist practices that performed by the Monpa and Sherdukpens communities which they received from Padmasmbhava in 8th century.

Sarita Khettry deals with the syncretism of religion in north-west India that manifested in art form. She also deals with the syncretism between various popular cults such as Yakshas, Hariti and Naga²⁴⁹ which were also found in Assam.

As far as the works on Buddhism in pre-Ahom Assam are concerned until the mid twentieth century, a number of scholars²⁵⁰ did not even admit the prevalence of Buddhism in early Assam. Their observations are based mainly on two grounds: (1) Assam or Kamarupa was not included in Asoka's empire,²⁵¹ (2) neither

²⁴⁵ P.V. Bapat(ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism*, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1956.

²⁴⁶ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, op.cit., p.154.

²⁴⁷ Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, op.cit.; Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist culture in India* Motilal Banarsidas, op.cit. S.C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in its Origin, Development and Influence*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi 1992; Hazra Kanai Lal, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with Special reference to India and Ceylon*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers New Delhi, 1982; Manikuntala Halder(De), *Baudha Dharmer Itihas*, MahaBodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 1996, reprint, 2007.

²⁴⁸ Niranjana Sarkar, *Buddhism among the Monpas and Sherdukpens*, Director of Research, Itanagar, 1980, reprint 2006; S.Dutta and B.Tripathi (eds), *Religious History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008.

²⁴⁹ Sarita Khettry, 'Buddhism and Contemporary Religions of the North-West: Syncretism, Assimilation and Conflict (c. First century B.C. –c. fifth Century A.D.)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 69th Session, Kannur, 2008, pp. 70-77.

²⁵⁰ N.K. Bhaattasali, *I.H.Q.*, vol.xxii, p.252 as referred in H.K Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., p.332; P.Bhattacharya, 'Buddhism in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol .iv, 1936, pp.115-118 and N.N. Dasgupta, 'Buddhism in Kamarupa', *I.H.Q.*, 1950, vol-xxvi, no.1, p.334.

²⁵¹ R.C. Mazumder, *History of Ancient India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 8th edn., 1977, p. 270f.

epigraphic nor the authentic literary source materials afford any definite information for the existence of Buddhism in early Assam. In support of this argument they even mention the observation of Hieun Tsang that there was not monastery in Assam.²⁵²

N.N. Dasgupta holds that neither epigraphical nor authentic literary affords any definite information for the existence of Buddhism in Assam. N.K.Bhaattasali opines that until the time of Yuan Tsang there was no trace of Buddhism in Assam. A same view is also held by P.Bhattacharya who maintains that neither Buddhism nor even Vajrayana prevailed in Kamarupa. The grants made by the Kamarupa kings which indicate only a change of faith from Saivism to Vaisnavism and nothing to do with any form of Buddhism. R.C. Mazumdar said that Kamarupa was outside the pale of early Buddhism because the region is not mentioned in the early Buddhist texts and in the inscriptions of Asoka.

Western scholars of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century²⁵³ such as Csoma de Koros, and Colonel Shakespeare²⁵⁴ studied the Buddhism in Assam. Following the tradition current in Tibet, the Hungarian scholar Csoma de Koros made an attempt to identify the place of Buddha's death at Sualkuchi. E. T. Dalton after examining some of the remains of Assam has expressed his view that they had been built with material belonging to earlier Buddhist shrines.²⁵⁵ Waddell had also referred to this tradition and held that the great demise took place in West Assam at Sualkuchi or near the Buddhist temple at Hajo. According to this belief Buddhist pilgrims from all parts of Bhutan, Tibet, and even from Ladakh and South

²⁵² T. Watters, T.W Rhy Davids & S.W. Bushel (ed.), *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India*, vol-II, London, 1904, p. 186; Shaman Hwui Li, *The life of Hiuen-Tsang* (tr.), Samuel Beal, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & com. 1911, popular edition 1914, p. 171.

N.B. There is certain definite information found regarding Buddhism of that period in the account of Hieun Tsang. Hieun Tsang who visited Kamarupa in the second quarter of the seventh century, observes that 'the people worshipped the devas and did not believe in Buddhism. So there had never been a Buddhist monastery in the land, and whatever Buddhists there were in it performed their acts of devotion secretly...though the king was not a Buddhist he treated accomplished sramanas with respect'. (Watters. T. II, p. 186.) Silabhadra persuaded Hieun-Tsang to accept the invitation of Bhaskarvarman on the plea that 'within his territories the law of Buddha had not widely extended' (*Life of Hieun Tsang*, p. 165.)

²⁵³ Csoma de Koros, *The Life and Teaching of Buddha*, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 33, 49ff.; L. W. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and North-Eastern Frontier*, Macmillan, London, 1914 (1st edn.) reprint, 2004 Spectrum publications, Guwahati, pp. 71-74.

²⁵⁴ L. W. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p. 71f, Calcutta Review, 1867, pp. 509-532.

²⁵⁵ E.T Dalton, 'Notes of Assam Temple Ruins,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol-Lxiv, 1855, p. 10f.

western China used to visit this spot.²⁵⁶ L. W. Shakespeare is of the opinion that Buddhist faith had prevailed even before the introduction of Hinduism in the region and many old temples might have been built on the old Buddhist sites. He also believes that Buddha not only died in Kamarupa as said by Tibetan tradition, but a Buddhist Council was also held in Assam.

The articles published in 1927 study two other aspects of Buddhism in Assam. B. Bhattacharya is of the view that among the four ancient important Vajrayani centers of Buddhism, three were located in Assam.²⁵⁷ He also informs that Luipada, who is regarded as one of the originators of the Shahajiya School of Buddhism, hailed from this area.²⁵⁸ S.C. Goswami tries to justify the existence of Buddhism in early Assam and examines the presence of various elements of Buddhism in neo-Vaisnavism.²⁵⁹

These studies are followed by some fragmentary works that are concerned with the various aspects of the existence of Buddhism in early Assam.²⁶⁰ Based on Buddhist traditions and literature, K.L.Barua studies the later aspects of Buddhism in Kamarupa. According to him, Buddhist Tantricism did not originate in Assam but it was a reputed center of Vajrayana until the development of neo-Vaisnavite movement led by Sankardeva. He believes, Ratnapala, the ruler of Kamarupa, was an adherent of Vajrayana and since then Kamarupa became a centre of Vajrayana. However, inscription of Pala rulers of Kamarupa does not speak so. K.L. Barua also thinks that some of the rulers of Kamarupa were followers of Vajrayana and the occurrence of the word 'Dharma' in the Puspabhadra grant of Dharmapala is an indication of the influence of Buddhism.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ A tradition that followed among the Lamas of Tibet that there is a most holy place of Buddhist pilgrimage called 'Tsam-ch'o-dun', next to the great temple at Buddha Gaya, situated in Assam. In *Jaschke's Tibetan Dictionary*, the name 'rTsamch'og-gron' is defined as 'a town in west Assam where Buddha died. L.A. Waddell, *Buddhism in Tibet or Lamaism*, op.cit., pp. 307-314.

²⁵⁷ B. Bhattacharya mentions four Vajrayana centers as Srihatta, Oddiyana, Purnagiri and Kamarupa.

²⁵⁸ B. Bhattacharya, 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *I.H.Q.*, vol-iii, 1927, no-1, pp. 733 & 746.

²⁵⁹ S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam' op.cit., pp. 47-756.

²⁶⁰ K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.ii, no.2, 1934, pp. 44-49; P. Gogoi, 'Buddhism in Kamarupa under Bhaskarvarman', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.xvi, 1962, pp. 52-56.

²⁶¹ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, op.cit., pp. 91-92.

Maheswar Neog²⁶² made some attempts to study the existence of Buddhism in early Assam utilising wider range of evidence such as: the inscriptions that are found in and outside the region, Buddhist literary works along with neo-Vaisnavite literatures). R.M. Nath²⁶³ observes the existence of Buddhist elements in socio-cultural life of Assam too.

These are the pioneering studies on Buddhism in Kamarupa. However, a number of scholars²⁶⁴ have also studied particularly the later aspects of Buddhism in Assam. Among the works on religion and culture in early Assam, the work *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*²⁶⁵ deals with various aspects of the religious history of early Assam. It tries to re-evaluate the *Puranic* myths. Though the prime objective of the work is to deal with the Sakta shrine of Kamakhya, the author focuses the evolution of Buddhist Tantra. Glimpses are also found about the early existence of Buddhist Tara deity at Nilachala premise when he described the various aspects of the origin of Kamakhya. However, he does not portray a complete picture of the evolution of Buddhist tantricism in Kamakhya. *Nilacala Kamakhya*²⁶⁶ is another recent work that deals with the evolution of goddess Kamakhya at Nilacala. Using various sources (legends, iconography and Tantric texts), the author assert about the existence of Buddhist tantrism in Kamarupa that contributed to the development of Hinduised deity Kamakhya Kameswari. These works have not only been consulted but also have been found useful in the preparation of this monograph.

Following the study of Dalton, Gangaram Choudhary²⁶⁷ shows the traces of Buddhism in different Hindu temples in Assam. However, the antiquity and the

²⁶² M. Neog, 'Buddhism in Kamrupa', *I.H.Q.*, vol-xxvii, June, 1951, no. 2, pp. 144-150.

²⁶³ R.M. Nath, 'Lui Pada and Matsyendranath', *J.A.R.S.*, vol. vii, no.1, 1939, pp. 48-57.

²⁶⁴ P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1987; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol.-I, *op.cit.*; B.K Baruah, *A cultural History of Assam* (earlyPeriod) vol-I, *op.cit.*; K.L.Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, 1960; Nirmal Prabha Bardoloi, *Devi*, *op.cit.*; Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Datta Barua and co. Guwahati, 1978.

²⁶⁵ B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*

²⁶⁶ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*

²⁶⁷ Gangaram Choudhary, *Defilement of Nilacala (Kamakhya) Astikumbha*, Assam Research Society for Buddhistic Studies, Guwahati, Assam, 1969; *idem.*, *Buddhist Relics in Assam*, Assam Research Society for Buddhistic Studies, Guwahati, Assam, first edition, 1961, p.6.

development of Buddhism are not elaborated. U.C.Talukdar²⁶⁸ also following the perception of Csoma de Koros that the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana* took at Sualkuchi area tried to justify it, but his assertion seems to be farfetched relevance.

S. Sasananda²⁶⁹ and B. Tripathy and S. Dutta,²⁷⁰ have studied the general aspects of the existence of Buddhism in ancient Assam. S. Sasanananda in his book *Buddhism in Ancient Assam* inadequately analyses the general trends of the prevalence of different forms of Buddhism in Ancient Assam. There are insufficient observations about the gradual changes in the forms of Buddhism and their relationship with material culture. He sometimes distorts some sources and tries to prove the prevalence of Theravada Buddhism in early Assam. Sasanananda cites 'Thera Dhitika' in place of 'Arya Dhitika' as mentioned by D.P.Chottopadhaya. This distortion is only to establish that Theravada doctrine prevailed in Assam in the early period.²⁷¹

Some works²⁷² on culture and religion (both in English and vernacular language) focus on the existence of Buddhist elements in socio-cultural life of early Assam. However, they do not describe the Buddhist response either to primitive society or to that of caste-oriented society of pre-Ahom Assam. *Religion of the North-East India* and *Purani Asamar Dharmar Dhara* give a general analysis of the different crypto-Buddhist practices that existed in pre-Ahom Assam. They also refer to the connection of Buddhism with Dharma Puja (that prevailed in Assam and Bengal) which was followed by the castes like 'Doms', 'Candals', and 'Hadis'. In *Kalita Jatir Itibritta*, B.K. Kakati mentions that the original religion of the Kalita was Buddhism. They migrated to Assam but later became '*Kulalupta*' (conversion from the original clan or religion). There is also reference about the existence of

²⁶⁸ Umesh Chandra Talukdar, *The place of Mahaparinibbana of Gautama Buddha*, The statesman Press Calcutta, 1957.

²⁶⁹ S. Sasanananda, *History of Buddhism in Assam*, Bahri Publication, New Delhi, 1986.

²⁷⁰ B. Tripathy & S. Dutta (eds.), *Buddhism in North- East India*, op.cit.

²⁷¹ Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India* (trans. Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chottopadhya), Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1970 (1st ednt edn.), reprint 1990 New Delhi ; S. Sasanananda, *History of Buddhism in Assam*, *ibid*, pp. 101-103.

²⁷² Maheswar Neog, *Religion of North East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008; *idem*.(ed.) *Banikanta Rasanawali, Kalitajatir Itibritta, Purani Asamar Dharmar Dhara*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1991; *idem.*, *Rasanawali*, vol.1, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 1996; Jatindra Kumar Borgohain, *Asamar Sanskritik Itihas*, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 2007.

Buddhism found in the *Assam Buranji*. Gunabhiram Barua mentions that some people of professional group such as Dom embraced Buddhism due to the prevailing caste system. But the chronology of the development is missing in his work. Moreover, the book takes no cognizance of any supporting evidence.²⁷³

H.P. Sastri's discovery (in 1907) of 'Caryapadas' and their translation had unveiled new dimensions to the study of Buddhism. Studies are going on to assess the contributions of the 'Caryapadas' to the growth and development of Assamese language and literature. Banikanta Kakati and Parikshit Hazarika have studied the linguistic characters of 'Caryapadas' composed by the Buddhist Sahajiya Siddhas in about 9th to 12th century and the influence of the latter in the development of Assamese language and literature.²⁷⁴ Thus, the works on the society and culture of Assam also throw some light on Buddhism in Assam as an offshoot of their study.

D. C. Sircar mentions the Puranic myth of Siva and Sati's body which occupies an important place in Assamese tradition and connected with the evolution of the mother goddess Kamakhya connected with Buddhist faith of worship of Buddha's corporal relics. He is also of the opinion that the *Catuspitha* conception (which is mentioned in *Kalikapurana*) is derived from Buddhist concept.²⁷⁵

Recently, periodical excavations in the areas of Goalpara, Paglatek and Barbhita area, new dimension of the history of Buddhism have been added and accordingly new observations are being made about the prevalence of Buddhism in early Assam.²⁷⁶

The studies so far on Buddhism are being made are unable to assess its influence on the socio-cultural life of Assam or the nature of the response of the population to the religion. Moreover, the works mentioned thus far are by and large

²⁷³ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

²⁷⁴ B.K. Kakati, *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1995; Parikshit Hazarika, *Caryapadas*, Dalimi Prakashan, Guwahati, 2007.

²⁷⁵ D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pihas', *op.cit.*, p. 7.

²⁷⁶ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'Role of Rivers for the Development of Civilisation with special reference to the History and Culture of the Garo Hills, Meghalaya', *J.A.R.S.*, vol-xxxvi, nos. 1 & 2, 1997; *idem.*, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*

descriptive in nature and hardly display any attempt on the part of the authors to interpret the evidence in any critical manner.²⁷⁷

In the historical researches on Assam the general aspects of Buddhism at the one hand has been neglected on the other the use of the Buddhist sources towards the same has been neglected too. This is despite the great potentiality that Buddhist sources have to offer to the researcher, considering the fact that traces of Buddhist beliefs and practices among various religious sects can still be found in Assam. There was thus the need to fill in this gap area. This was the task that this study has taken up. Since it was not easy to cover the entire history of Buddhism of various sects (with the exception of Hinayana) in Assam within the limits of the prescribed time-frame for undertaking doctoral work, the focus of this study has been on the different Mahayana forms that existed in pre-Ahom Assam and on their influence on the socio-cultural developments during that period. Moreover, from the preliminary readings of extant works it appears that Mahayana forms of Buddhism had been dominant in pre-Ahom Assam, particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Objectives:

The objectives of this research have been as follows:

- i. To trace the beginnings and development of Buddhism in Assam;
- ii. To examine the impact of Buddhism on society and culture of pre-Ahom Assam and *vice-versa*.

Methodology and Data:

The evidence of the existing sources have been scientifically re-interpreted and re-examined by applying the historical method. The work is based on both primary and secondary sources. Data have been collected from various libraries, archives and museums. These have also been corroborated from field studies of the Buddhist sites, monuments and other material remains.

Chapter -1

Introduction

²⁷⁷ Buddhism with its various forms associated with some areas and the factors contributing to the growth of those forms had not been studied in connection with trade guilds, modes of production, the ideal of *varnasramadhama* or in terms of socio-economic and cultural contexts.

The introductory chapter deals with the geographical location of Assam, its ethnicity, political conditions, political ideology, internal, and external relationship, material structure- economy and trade, cultural /religious beliefs where Buddhism was introduced and developed. It also includes a review of literature.

Chapter- 2

Beginnings and Development of Buddhism in Assam

This chapter focuses on the beginning and development of Buddhism in Assam. The chapter also tries to highlight different temporal and local conditions that influenced the nature of the development of Buddhism in different socio-political periods of Assam. As the Buddhist tantric traits mostly dominated in the region, the chapter also deals with origin, development and nature of tantricism in details.

Chapter 3:

Forms of Buddhism in Assam

This chapter deals with the nature of transformation of Buddhism after its introduction in Assam. It focuses the gradual development of the nature of the ritualistic aspects that reveal from the early stupa worship to the synthesis of esoteric Buddhism with new-Brahmanical religion.

Chapter- 4

Impact of Buddhism on the Social Life of Assam

This chapter discusses the influence of Buddhism on the social life of Assam.

Chapter -5

Buddhism and its Impact on Cultural Developments

This chapter is devoted to inquiring into Buddhist influence on rites and rituals, art and sculpture, language and literature of early Assam.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This chapter will provide an overview of the entire discussion and highlight the major findings.

Chapter 2

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Buddhism emerged in the 6th century B.C.E. in a state of significant socio-economic changes that occurred in northern India.¹ That was a period when the Vedic religion gradually ceases to be a strong living force and the effectiveness of the Brahmanical rituals was challenged.² Thus, the door was opened for the emergence of various heterodox forces in the society. Buddhism represented a spirit of revolt against Vedic faith and philosophy especially in its ritualistic aspects.³ Lord Buddha's message appealed particularly to the town-dwellers and the new social classes, which emerged during that period.⁴ However, at the time of Buddha's death in the 5th century B.C.E., the Buddhist order consisted of small groups of mendicants in India. During that period, Buddhist faith was confined only to a few

¹ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1993, p. 15; Romila Thapar, *A History of Ancient India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1966, vol.1, pp. 62-67.

² The large scale implementation of iron is instrumental for the extension of agriculture in the 7th -6th century B.C., that resulted in the surplus and contributed to the growth of urban society in the Ganga valley. Thus, the period was marked by the rise of urbanism and a new mercantile community i.e., new forms of social and economic relations built around trade and agriculture. Buddhism seems to be a body of thought responding to the ideological sustenance of urban norms and values. For details, see Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 2006, pp. 7&15; D.N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 65-73.

³ Satis Chandra Chatterji, *Classical Indian Philosophy*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1985, p. 10.

⁴ Non-violence of Buddhism helped to maintain cordial relationship among the kingdoms that promoted trade and commerce. The traders who were known as vaisya got third rank in *Varnasramadharma* based Brahmanical society and inclined towards Buddhism. For details, see R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 132.

areas namely Magadha, Kosala (corresponding to the modern south Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh) along with some circumjacent principalities and republic.⁵

In the third century B.C.E., under the patronage of Asoka, Buddhism obtained a dominant position. Asoka actively propagated Buddhism in many independent and quasi independent states, both on the borders of the empire and beyond.⁶ In India, Asoka dispatched missionaries to various parts viz., Vanavasi, Aparantha, Maharattha of Western India along with Kashmir and Gandhara of the Himalayan region.⁷

After the fall of the Mauryan dynasty, Indian Buddhist monks were deprived of their rich state patronage. Maurya dynasty was followed by the Sungas and the Kanvas who were all staunch supporters of Brahmanism. Of course, the Sunga-Kanva period witnessed the establishment of various Stupas and monasteries.⁸ In the post-Asokan period, especially during the period of Kushana, a number of Buddhist missions were sent abroad. With the geographical spread, Buddhism came into contact with different people and received new ideas.⁹ Buddhism also adapted to meet the requirements of the people of each area, resulting in wide variation of its interpretation.¹⁰ Subsequently, many schools of Buddhism developed in India and

⁵ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 2; Bhikshu Santarakshita, 'Buddhism' A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 7th impression 2002, p. 83; For details, see Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, op.cit., p. ix.

⁶ Asoka sent missionaries to different directions as far as Macedonia, Syria and Egypt in the west and Ceylon in the south to propagate Theravada doctrine. *The Way of the Buddha*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcastings, Govt. of India, New Delhi, p.308; Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp.145-148.

⁷ D.R. Bhandarkar, *Asoka*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 149-150; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 255.

⁸ Some of the Buddhist establishments are located in India are Bodhi Gaya, Bharhut and Sanchi in North India, Nasik, Karle, Ajanta in western India and Amaravati and Jaggayapeta in the south. *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p.309.

⁹ D.N. Jha, *Early India*, op.cit., p. 138.

N.B. Kanishka who patronized Buddhism, also extended his dominion to Kashmir, Kabul, Gandhar, Kashgarh, Yarakand and Khotan of China. Under his patronage, Buddhism spread to China, Korea, and Japan etc. For details, see Manikuntala Halder (De), *Buddha Dharma Itihas*, Maha Bodhi Book Agency, Calcutta, 1996 reprint 2007, p. 72.

¹⁰ Buddhism received new mode of expression according to the needs for its survival and expansion and was undergoing distinct changes in succeeding periods. For details, see Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. vii & 36; Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 1; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 25 and Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, pp. 57 & 72-74.

abroad¹¹ and Buddhism assumed the form of a 'dynamic religion of the world'.¹² The term 'Indian Buddhism' is used to distinguish Buddhism in India and the Buddhism that prevails in other countries of the world.

New modes of expressions are found in Buddhism in the wake of feudal developments too.¹³ In the early centuries of Common Era, some feudal elements appeared in India. Kushanas, who had preserved the traditional institutions and republican elements, introduced some elements of feudalism. Satavahana rulers also made land grants to favoured persons or institutions, including Buddhist communities, giving up the administrative rights of the central government along with at least part of the revenue.¹⁴ In the same period, Buddhism developed into two distinct forms that are known as Mahayana (the great vehicle) and Hinayana (the lesser vehicle).¹⁵ The Mahayana Buddhism in some ways reflects the transition to feudalism. As a part of ideological transition accompanying or preparing for the new form of society, the Bodhisattva was projected as a benevolent lord and the Buddha was designed as the supreme overlord of the universe.¹⁶ Accordingly, teachings concerning the protecting power of the Buddha i.e. beliefs towards Buddha's Amitabha and Aksobhya appeared which reflected the need of common people to depend on someone greater than them.¹⁷ During the Gupta period Buddhism did not obtain patronage directly from the rulers but this period is marked by the Buddhist literary and philosophical effloresce, producing outstanding logicians, philosophers and commentators and witnessed the full development of

¹¹ Excepting Vietnam, the southern countries mainly affiliated to Theravada Buddhism. While China, Korea and Japan, Mahayana Buddhism holds sway. Buddhism retained its original form in Ceylon and Burma, Siam and Combodia, but went through many transformations elsewhere. P.V. Bapat, 'Schools and sects of Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1958, p. 489.

¹² Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, 1977-78, vol-xi, p. 243.

¹³ A.K. Warder, 'Feudalism and Mahayana Buddhism' R.S. Sharma (ed.), *Indian Society: Historical Probing*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, p. 164; D. N. Jha, *Early India*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁴ A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 373.

¹⁵ Mahayana Buddhism appears to have originated in the first century B.C. or first century C.E. For details, see A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, Rupa & co, New Delhi, third edition, 1967, p. 264.

¹⁶ A. K. Warder, 'Feudalism and Mahayana Buddhism', *op.cit.*, p. 164.

¹⁷ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 270.

Mahayana Buddhism with its two schools, *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara*.¹⁸ It has been said that ‘The Mahayanic developments were primarily as a result of the changing material milieu as well as a product of its contacts with Brahmanism and its various sectarian manifestations.’¹⁹

Buddhism continued to respond to the socio-political condition of India and took esoteric turn especially from seventh century onward.²⁰ The period, after the rule of Guptas and the Bhakatakas, with the absence of a central imperial power in India there developed regional powers, military adventurism and feudalistic traits. The contested domain of the political and military life of India, particularly in the North, profoundly affected Buddhist activity.²¹ In the same period, Buddhist lost its patronage from guild. Thus, both great Buddhist monasteries and lay associations found themselves in challenges from all sides and they started to adjust itself to the pressure of its environments. Accordingly, they responded by appropriating themselves to the socio-political condition in India which led to the esoteric turn of Buddhist practices. In course of time, Buddhism in India became a ritually oriented Buddhist order.²² As a response to the contemporary socio-political condition, different Mahayana pantheons were arranged in the *Mandala*, placing them in a manner of feudalistic, hierarchical relations with central and nuclear system.²³ In the post-Gupta period, Harshavardhana was one of the most important rulers who patronized and popularised Buddhist learning at the Buddhist University of Nalanda. Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India from 630C.E.to 644 C.E., refers to the flourishing condition of Buddhism from Taxila and further west to

¹⁸ Editors preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, Lxi.

¹⁹ Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 67; S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism, History of Indian Buddhism*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerat, 1987, pp. 211-212.

²⁰ Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 371.

²¹ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism, A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 114.

²² For details, see *ibid.*, pp. 2-8 & pp. 74-79.

²³ With the loss of patronage from trading guild, Buddhist groups searched for new kinds of patronage and placed monasteries in the position of assuming many of the characteristics of the society around them. They gained stature as landed feudal lords, collecting rents and taxes and exercising judicial powers in their domains. As a result, the monasteries began to internalize many of the same value systems that the external society reflected. *Ibid.* pp. 111-112 & 133.

Pundravardhana and Samatata in the east and from Kashmir and Nepal to the Cola country in the South.²⁴

After that, the chief patron rulers were Pala kings who ruled over a considerable part of Bengal and Bihar. They not only made liberal gifts for the maintenance of the university and other Buddhist organizations, but also established some monasteries such as Odantapuri, Vikramsila, Somapura and Jaggadala.²⁵ In this period Buddhism mostly developed in India as a synthesis of Mahayana and tantric elements. This esoteric Buddhism or Vajrayana accepted as a legitimate Buddhist tradition that practiced at the great Buddhist monasteries and current in India from the 7th century to the 13th century.²⁶ Tantricism was imparted in the curriculum of education in the universities such as Nalanda, Vikramsila and Jogaddala, at Nalanda.²⁷ After the seventh century, esoteric Buddhism in India was performed in two ways that are monks performed this forms in the great monastic institution and performance by the non-institutional Buddhist Siddhas.²⁸

During the Gupta and post-Gupta period, Tantric rites and practices were also well developed within Hinduism and shared certain common features in their rituals and practices. Gradually, Buddhist tantricism or the esoteric system appropriated and negotiated the values and behavioral systems of non-Buddhist Saiva and other clerical tradition and coalesced with various tenets of Hinduism.

²⁴ Chinese pilgrim It-tsing, who came to India after Hiuen-Tsang, mentions that Buddhism was in a state of decay. Kanai Lal Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with Special Reference to India and Ceylon*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1982, p. 45.

²⁵ In India, up to the 7th century, most of the rulers patronized both religions viz. Hinduism and Buddhism. However, after seventh and eight centuries, except Palas of Bengal, the rulers of India staunchly supported Brahmanical religion. In the north, Pratihara dynasty in South, Pandya Pallavaa and Rastrakuta dynasty supported Brahmanical religion. Esoteric Buddhism received the patronage of the Pala rulers, especially of Devapala (C.E.810-850). Editors preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-I, *op.cit.*, p.lxii ; Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 4-5; Manikuntala Haldar (De), *Baudha Dharmer Itihas*, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-87; *The Way of the Buddha*, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

²⁶ Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1966, vol.1, p. 160; B. Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 530; *idem.*, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma KLM Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1958, p. 2.

²⁷ Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1962, p. 349.

²⁸ The distinction between institutional and non-institutional esoterism is that, the former based on decisions predominantly made within the monastic community, and the latter is the product of the Buddhist siddha culture. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

Accordingly, outward differences between Hinduism and Buddhism had disappeared. Thus, Romila Thapar rightly comments, ‘Theoretically, Buddhism was a formidable rival of Hinduism, but in ritual of worship and in practice, it had compromised with the Brahmanical religion to such an extent that it could almost have been regarded as a sect of the later’.²⁹ Buddhism gradually declined in Eastern India during the period of Islamic advance in the 12th century C.E.³⁰ At the beginning of the 13th century C.E., Buddhism ceased to exist as an institutional religious force in eastern India.³¹ But it is said ‘In Kamarupa they (Buddhist) continued to practice their rites undisturbed till the rise of Sankardeva’.³² Buddhism may have disappeared from India, but it has left a profound mark on cultural heritage of India. Throughout its history in India, Buddhism and other religions influenced each other.³³ Buddhist tantricism which was a dominant form in Assam exerted a tremendous influence over some of the beliefs and practices of the people of the region.

As explained in the first chapter of this dissertation, politically Assam was situated outside the periphery of the empire of Asoka and Kaniska who had patronized Buddhism in India. However, the Brahmaputra Valley is a region of interaction of various cultures and religions, including Buddhists. The growth of Buddhism, in a sense, is the response to this interaction.

Both archaeological and early Buddhist literary works provide the information about the early existence of Buddhism in Assam. Besides these, traces of the development of Buddhism are also found in Brahmanical literature in form of myths. Lama Taranatha, the 17th century scholar, refers several times about the existence of Buddhism in early Kamarupa.

²⁹ Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

³⁰ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, Oxford University press, London, 1938 (1st edn.) reprint Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2009, p. 275.

³¹ The burning down of Vikramsila University symbolized the disappearance of Buddhist institution in its birth place. Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 5; John Newman, ‘Islam in the Kalacakra Tantra,’ *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol.21, no.2, 1998, p. 311.

³² K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Lawyers Book Stall Publications, Guwahati, 1960, p. 219.

³³ G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra, With the Commentary Yogaratnamala*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992 reprint 2001, Delhi, p. xv.

Though giving a precise date to its origin is difficult but all the testimonials furnish that Buddhism was introduced in Assam during post-Asokan period. S. Sasanananda is of the opinion that Assam received knowledge of Buddhism when Asoka sent missionary to propagate Buddhism to Suvarnabhumi. He shows the possibility that the missionary used the route via Assam and accordingly the people might have received the knowledge about Buddhism.³⁴ But there were not any authentic evidence that Buddhism appeared in Assam at that time.

The earliest evidence of the existence of Buddhism in Assam is the scattered votive stupas that are found at Surya Parhar area (about 14 K.M away from Goalpara town) situated in lower Assam. There are as many as 25 votive stupas of different shapes and sizes, cut out of granite boulders. S.K. Swaraswati placed the period of the rock cut votive stupas of as early as between 100 B.C. and C.E. 100.³⁵ A numbers of caves also found in Paglatek (one cave), Yogighopa (five caves) and at Pancaratna (three caves) along with one monolithic stupa. Scholar believes that the caves which assigned about early centuries of the Common Era, were used by the Buddhist monks.³⁶

Apart from the Buddhist remains of early centuries, several references are found in the early Buddhist work *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* about the prevalence of Buddhist practices in Assam. The period of the composition of the work is between second or third century C.E.³⁷ It has been found mentioned in the work that the

³⁴ The region Suvanabhumi is known as South-East Asia which includes lower Burma, Thailand, Malay Peninsula and also archipelago. There are two routes to reach South-East Asia., land route and sea route. By the land route, one could reach north Thailand via Assam. For details, see S. Sasanananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, Bahri Publication, New Delhi, 1986, p. 100.

³⁵ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol- xxix, 2004-2006, p. 204; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1990, p. 429.

³⁶ Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 208.

³⁷ It is important here to mention that the scholars are not unanimous over the period of the composition of *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*. Benoytosh Bhattacharya is of the view that this was composed between second or third century C.E. and possibly by Nagarjuna. Whereas Hajime Nakamura is of the view that the copy of *Aryamanjusri Mulakalpa*, which is available to us is not the product of that period and some of the chapters have been composed much after. The work originally consisted of twenty-eight chapters or even less, and the copy which we have comprises of fifty-five chapters is published by the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series. He further emphasises that the 53rd Chapter of *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* was composed in the middle of the 8th century i.e. during the reign of Gopala of Pala dynasty of Bengal. Hajime Nakamura's view is also endorsed by Joseph Walser. For

Mantra given by *Manjusri Kumarbhuta* was exercised successfully in the various places including Kamarupa along with the bank of Lauhitya³⁸ and the *mantras* of Kartikeya, given by Manjusri flourished in Kamarupa.³⁹ In the same work it has also been found mentioned that Kamarupa was a significant place for Tara worship.⁴⁰ Taranatha, in his *Buddhism in India*, mentioned that Dhitika was responsible⁴¹ for the spread of Buddhism in Assam. The event related to his preaching of the doctrine has been mentioned in following words:

‘In Kamarupa, in the east there lived a Brahmin called Siddha who was as wealthy as great king and has thousand of attendants. He used to worship the Sun. Once while he was worshipping the sun, Arya Dhitika, by his miraculous power, made himself emerge as it were from the solar region and sat in front of him, radiating luster. Taking him to be the sun god, he (Siddha) bowed down to him and worshipped him. He (Dhitika) delivered sermons to him. When the Brahmana was full of reverence, the Arya revealed his real self and preached the doctrine over again. The *Bhahmana* realised the truth and with great reverence built a vihara called Mahacaitya

details of these views, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, ‘Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 263 & 272; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1987, p. 319; Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 21.

³⁸ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, vol- II, Trivandrum Sanskrit series, no.lxxvi, 1922, 30 Patala (Chapter), p. 325.

³⁹ ‘Kartikeyashya e mantrah kathita Manjubhanina

Tasmidese tada sidhi bhabiswati na sansaya

Sriparbate tada dese Vindhyakuksinitambayu

Dipebyeya cha sarbata Kalingadesu kityate

Ttrygunya Mlecchadesesu samantata

Ambhuge kukshiniranta nripakhyanta anantaka

Kamarupakalakhya hi Himadre kuksimasrita.....’ T.Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, vol-iii, Trivandrum Sanskrit series, no.lxxxiv, 1925, p. 628.

N.B. A numbers Kartikeya image found in different parts of Assam viz. Da-Parvatiya in, Urvasi and Devastan (Nagaon district). For details see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, pp. 64-366 & 375-376.

⁴⁰ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, vol-iii, *op.cit.*, p. 648; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004, p. 32; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, p. 303.

⁴¹ Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha’s History of Buddhism in India*, Lama Chimpa, Alaka Chattopadhyaya (trans.), Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, reprint 1990, p. 45.

(Mahastupa). He also lavishly entertained the Sangha's all around.

Thus, the law of Buddha was widely spread in Kamarupa'.⁴²

S. Sasananda believes Dhitika was almost contemporary of Asoka.⁴³ However, Taranatha refers Dhitika as the contemporary of Menander.⁴⁴ The period of famous Indo-Greek ruler Menandar flourished during first century B.C.E.⁴⁵

It has also mentioned in the same source that Matriceta,⁴⁶ who was proficient in *mantra*, *Tantra* and debate, defeated in debate, the Buddhists of Odivisa, Gauda, Tirhuti, Kamarupa and other places.⁴⁷ As Matriceta was contemporary of Kaniska⁴⁸, therefore, it seems that Buddhism prevailed in Kamarupa during the early centuries of the era.

It was mentioned in the Nagarjunikunda inscription (Andhra Pradesh) of the 3rd century C.E.⁴⁹ that King Madhariputra dedicated a shrine 'for the benefit of the fraternities of the monks of Tambapamna who had converted Kashmira, Gandhara, Cina, Cilata, Tosali, Avaramta, Vamga, Vanavasi, Yavana and Damila, Parula.'⁵⁰ Scholar believes that the word Cilata represents *Kirata* or Kamarupa.⁵¹ Thus, it

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴³ S. Sasananda shows that Asoka was the disciple of Upagupta and Dhitika was the disciple of the later. Accordingly, Dhitika must be almost a contemporary of Asoka. S. Sasananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁴ Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, p. 46; S. Sasananda, *History of Buddhism in Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

⁴⁵ R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

⁴⁶ Tibetan historian on Buddhism, Taranatha, identified Matriceta with Asvaghosha. However, only Taranatha identifies the two, while much earlier Chinese pilgrim I-Tsing plainly distinguished the two authors. The main ground of this identification is that, both (Matriceta with Asvaghosha) stood in relation to Kaniska as the two authors on Buddhism flourished in the court of Kanishka. E.W. Thomas in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, viii, 49 f. as referred in Taranatha's *History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 391-392.

⁴⁷ D.P. Chattopahya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁸ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

⁴⁹ Maheswar Neog, 'Buddhism in Kamrupa,' *I.H.Q.*, vol-xxvii, 1951, no.2, p. 145. In the early centuries of the Christian era, Nagarjunikunda was a great center of Buddhism, as the local kings (Satavahana and Ikshakus) were great patron of the religion. For details, see *The Way of the Buddha*, Publication Division, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

⁵⁰ *Epigraphica Indica*, xx, pp.22-23, as cited Maheswar Neog, 'Buddhism in Kamrupa,' *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁵¹ R.M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, Datta Barua, Guwahati, second edition, 1978, p. 31; Maheswar Neog, 'Buddhism in Kamrupa,' *op.cit.*, p. 145,

emerges from the discussion that both archaeological and textual evidence provide information about the prevalence of Buddhism in Assam in the early centuries of Common Era.

Though politically Assam was situated outside the periphery of the empire of Asoka and Kaniska who patronized Buddhism in India, Assam had maintained its socio-cultural contacts with Indian mainland and continued its trade links with places (such as Tibet, China, Bhutan, and Burma) where Buddhism had been prevailing.⁵²

Buddhism was also closely associated with the merchant class. Therefore, Buddhist settlement, caves and monasteries were generally located in the area of major trade routes as they were patronized by merchants and merchant guilds.⁵³ In the western side of Assam, the trade mainly carried out by river transport, through Brahmaputra and Ganga. The traders carried their goods through Brahmaputra and reached the sea after skirting round Garo Hills. Since the area (greater Goalpara area and Garo Hills) was very close to the river bank of Brahmaputra, it might have been an important trade centre.⁵⁴ There are Buddhist remains of early centuries that found in the western Assam witnessed the Buddhist settlement in the past. There are many Buddhist remains discovered in the area including Pancharatna, Barbhita village and Bhaitbari (now in Meghalaya) in the southern Bank of the lower Brahmaputra valley. The archaeological excavation at Bhaitabari (located in the present Garo Hills, about 225 K.M. west of modern Guwahati) reveals that right from the beginning of the Christian era, in the west of the Brahmaputra, there was an

Note: The Mongoloid inhabitants of eastern frontier traditionally known as Kirata. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'Kirata-Jana-Kirti,' *J.R.A.S.B.*, vol-xiv, no. 1948, p. 167.

⁵² For details, see B. N. Mukherjee, *External Trade of Early North-East India*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

⁵³ D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 2nd edition, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1975, pp. 182-185; Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, p. 68; D. N. Jha, *Early India*, pp. 138-139.

⁵⁴ Scholar thinks the area including Bhaitabari, as the capital of varmana rulers who ruled in Assam till the end of the seventh century C.E., For details, see Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'Role of Rivers for the Development of Civilisation with Special Reference to the History and Culture of the Garo Hills, Meghalaya' *J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxxvi, nos.1 & 2, 1997, p. 181; For details, see A.K. Sarma, *Emergence of Early culture in India*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 1993.

extensive settlement with Buddhist elements.⁵⁵ The traders crossed the sea and traded in sea-ports like Tamralipti (Tamralipta)⁵⁶ where Buddhism prevailed.⁵⁷ It may presume that a section of Buddhist associated with trade and commerce, came into the region and constructed the stupas near Garo hill and Suya Pahar area.

Some areas where Buddhism was prevailing were also under the political control of Kamarupa. Pundravardhan, where considerable headway of Buddhism occurred⁵⁸ was a part of early Kamarupa during the rule of Bhutibarman i.e. in the middle of 6th century C.E.

Politically, rulers of Kamarupa also maintained its socio-cultural contacts with the other parts of India and abroad where Buddhism made its headway. Kalhan, the 12th century chronicler of Kashmir, mentions that Amritprabha, the daughter of a ruler of Kamarupa married to Meghavahana, the ruler of Kashmir. Amritprabha is said to have been accompanied by her father's preceptor, a Tibetan Buddhist monk named Stunpa.⁵⁹ This Stunpa erected a stupa in Kashmir that is known as Lo-Stunpa. Amritprabha also erected a lofty Vihara (monastery), now corrupted to Amitabhabhavan.⁶⁰ Scholar identifies the name of the ruler of Kamarupa with Balavarman I (399 C.E.-422 C.E.) of 5th century C.E.⁶¹ As the supposed disciple of Stunpa and the father of Amritprabha, i.e. Balavarman performed large number of

⁵⁵ There is a mud cum brick stupa at Bhaitabari, which is the first stupa discovered in North-Eastern India.

Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'Role of Rivers for the Development of Civilisation with Special Reference to the History and Culture of the Garo Hills, Meghalaya, *op.cit.*, p. 171

⁵⁶ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

⁵⁷ Fa-hien, who visited India during Gupta period (between C.E. 399 and C.E. 413) and stayed in Tamralipti for two years found not less than twenty-two Buddhist Viharas and a large number of sculptures and paintings of Buddha in Tamralipta alone. Thomas Watters(tr.), *On Yuan –Chwang's travels in India*, London, 1904-05, reprint 1973 Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, p. 185.

⁵⁸ According to the *Vinaya Pitaka*, Buddhism had already made considerable headway in the Pundra region, and Vanga was also beginning to grow as one of the important centers of Buddhism. B.N. Choudhary, *Buddhist Centers in Ancient India*, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 5-6 & 194; D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Religious life of Ancient and Medieval India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 2010 (reprint,), p. 184.

⁵⁹ *Rajtarangini*, vol.1, pp. 81-82, *Rajtarangini*, vol.III, pp .9- 10 as cited in P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

⁶⁰ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. i, *op.cit.*, p. 335.

⁶¹ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, third edition (revised), 1987, p. 402.

sacrifices by *Dakshina* (gift),⁶² evidently he was not the follower of Buddhism. Thus, Balavarman's association with Stunpa is similar with the attitude of Bhaskar Varman toward Hieun-Tsang.⁶³ However, this statement of Kalhana shows that Kamarupa had its early contact with Tibetan form of Buddhism, as 'Stunpa' is equivalent of Guru (preceptor) in Tibetan language.⁶⁴ According to P.C. Choudhary, "The evidence not only points to cultural relations between Kamarupa, Tibet and Kashmir, but also seems to establish the fact that Buddhism was prevalent in Kamarupa and was patronized by its rulers".⁶⁵ It has been said that during the 6th century, Buddhist monks Jnabhadra, Jinayasas and Yasogupta worked in China. Scholar believed that they hailed from Kamarupa.⁶⁶ There was also political and social contact between Nalanda and Kamarupa, prior to the visit of Hieun. The Brahmanas or non-Buddhist scholars from Kamarupa visited Nalanda to engage with Hiuen Tsang in a religious debate at the monastery there.⁶⁷

During the period of Bhaskaravarman in the seventh century, Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen Tsang visited and stayed at Kamarupa for a month.⁶⁸ Though Bhaskaravarman was a Hindu by religion, he showed his reverence towards all religions and respected to learned Sramanas.⁶⁹ Bhaskaravarman hearing about the insight of the pilgrim through the Brahmanas, sent an invitation to Hieun Tsang addressing Silabhadra of Nalanda University twice.⁷⁰ Hiuen Tsang received warm welcome by Bhaskarvarmana. Bhaskarvarmana fascinated to the learned scholar Hiuen Tsang and took part in religious assembly at Kanauj which was arranged by Harshavardhan in honour of Hiuen Tsang.⁷¹ The biography of Hieun Tsang written

⁶² Dubi Copper Plate Grant, verse 16, M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Guwahati University, 1978, p. 21.

⁶³ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. i, *op.cit.*, p. 335.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁶⁵ P.C. Choudhary, *History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century A.D.*, Guwahati, 1966, p. 402.

⁶⁶ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89; H. K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, p. 112.

⁶⁸ For details, see E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, third edition 1984 (reprint), pp. 27-29; N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, Monarhar, New Delhi, 1995, p. 122.

⁶⁹ T. Watters (eds. T.W. Rhys Davids & S.W. Bushell), *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, II, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1904, p. 196.

⁷⁰ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

⁷¹ H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.* p. 333

by his disciple Saman Hwui Li shows that on the eve of his departure Bhaskarvarman addressed the pilgrim “If the Master is able to dwell in my dominions and receive my religious offerings, I will undertake to found one hundred monasteries on the Master's behalf.”⁷² According to an opinion, Bhaskarvarman, along with his ministers, accepted Buddhism.⁷³ In the words of N.N. Bhattacharya:

“This episode suggests that during the seventh century C.E., Buddhism was well known in Kamarupa and despite the communication difficulties of those days Buddhist monks and servants, even of foreign country, were recognized and admired. Bhaskarvarman, like his illustrious contemporary Harshadeva, was an enlightened monarch who though was not a Buddhist himself, patronized Buddhism”.⁷⁴

Hieun Tsang left an account where he cited about the prevailing condition of Buddhism in contemporary Kamarupa. He refers that “whatever Buddhist there were in it (Kamarupa), performed their acts of devotion secretly”.⁷⁵ Scholar interprets this type of secret performance because of the persecution of Buddhists by Saivite rulers of Kamarupa.⁷⁶ However, it has no ground to believe in such type of persecution. On the other hand, it has already been mentioned above in this discussion that Kamarupa ruler Balvarman, father of Amritprabha, who was not the follower of Buddhism but had his reverence towards Buddhism. The attitude of Bhaskarvarman also shows his religious toleration. Thus, scholar believes Hieun Tsang mentioned the secret practice to meant the esoteric rites that were being performed by the Buddhists in Kamarupa.⁷⁷

⁷² Shaman Hwui Li, Beal, Samuel (trans) *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, Kegan Paul, Truner & Co. London, 1914, pp. 187-188.

⁷³ A. Walley, *The Real Tripitaka*, London 1952, as referred in P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁷⁴ For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

⁷⁵ T. Watters, T.W. Rhy Davids & S.W. Bushell (eds.), *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, vol. II, London, 1904, p. 186, cited in H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 333; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

⁷⁶ N.N. Dasgupta, ‘Buddhism in Kamarupa’, *I.H.Q.*, vol. xxvi, 1950, p. 333; M. Neog, ‘Buddhism in Kamarupa’, *I.H.Q.*, vol. xxvii, no-2, 1952, p. 144.

⁷⁷ For details, see M. Neog, ‘Buddhism in Kamarupa’, *op.cit.*, p. 144.

I-tsing, who visited Eastern India about last quarter of the seventh century, in his *Kau-fa-Kao-Sang –Chuen* has given brief memoirs of fifty –six Buddhist monks who visited India from China and its neighbourhood. One of them Hwui-Lin, a native of Korea, in his memoir refers to a king of Eastern India Devavarman who ruled for some time before the advent of the Salastambhas. This ruler was a Buddhist who expressed his desire to bestow the Mrgasikhavana agrahara near Nalanda for the monks of China.⁷⁸ P.C. Choudhary believes Devavarman was Salastambha who undertaken a Mleccha revolt ascended the throne of Kamarupa after Bhaskarvarman.⁷⁹

Salastambha was a non-Aryan leader ⁸⁰ who probably followed the *Salistambha Sutra* of Mahayana Buddhism.⁸¹ Buddhist tantricism became well established during the period of early rulers of Salastambha dynasty.⁸² During this period, Kamarupa emerged as one of the main centers among the four-important Vajrayana (Tantric form of Buddhism) centers of *Hevajra* list. *Hevajra Tantra*, the Buddhist work assigned shortly before 693C.E.⁸³ mentions Kamakhya as one of the main centers of Vajrayana along with other three important Vajrayana centers situated in Assam and Eastern India.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

⁷⁹ J.C. Ghosh believes that Avanti Varman was a successor of Bhaskarvarman who fought against a Mleccha revolt that led by Devavarman alias Salastambha. R.C. Majumadar identified Devavarman as Deva Gupta of Later Gupta dynasty. R.C. Majumadar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1971, p. 79; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 124. For details, see P.C. Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

⁸⁰ Bargaon Copper Plate of Ratnapala (c.1035C.E.) refers Salastambha as the lord of Mlecch. M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Department of Publication Guwahati University, Guwahati, 1978, p. 161.

⁸¹ *Salistambha sutra* deals with the Mantrayana diction of Mahayana Buddhism. Accordingly, presumes that the name of king Salastambha derives from the *Salistambha Sutra* of Mahayana Buddhism. For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, Distributors Assam Book Depot, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 2004, pp. 6 & 14.

⁸² Salastambha dynasty ruled Assam from around 655C.E. to 990 C.E.

⁸³ B. Bhattacharya of the opinion that *Hevajra Tantra* was composed shortly before 693 C.E. According to Buddhist tradition, Padmavajra, the author of the *Hevajra Tantra*, was the preceptor of Anangavajra, a son of Gopala, who founded the Pala dynasty in Bengal about the middle of the eight century. For details, see D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xiv, no. 1, 1948, p. 12.

⁸⁴ B. Bhattacharya has mentioned other Vajrayana centers in India as Srihatta, Oddiyana, Purnagiri and Kamarupa. B. Bhattacharya, 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *I.H.Q.*, vol. iii, no.1, 1927, pp. 733-746.

Following is the verse of *Hevajra Tantra* mentioning about Kamarupa:

*'Vajragarbha ubaca/
He Bhagavan ke te pithadyagh/ Bhagaban aha/
Pitham Jalandharam/khyatam
Uddiyana Thaiva ca/
Pitham Purnagiri's caiva
Kamrupam tathaiva ca/*

Trans. *Vajragarbha* asked; *Oh Bhagavan*, which are the *pithas* (sacred place), and the other Meeting places? *Bhagavan* replied: The *pithas* are Jalandhara, Oddiyana, Purnagiri and Kamarupa'.⁸⁵ The Buddhist remains that are found in the region are largely affiliated to Mahayana and Tantric form of Buddhism (Vajrayana).⁸⁶ It is to note here that sometime Kamakhya is substituted by Kamarupa.⁸⁷

Above discussion shows that Buddhism was introduced in Assam during post-Asokan period. In the first few centuries of the Common Era, a group of the followers of Buddhism entered Assam using the trade routes from the western boundary of Assam and performed their practices by constructing stupas in Goalpara area. They associated and adapted with the prevailing beliefs and faiths. Initially the interaction started between the Buddhist practices and the practices of the indigenous people of Assam. Subsequently, the elements of Bon religion too influenced the interaction and as an outcome of these the tantric traits developed in Assam. Inference of this can be found in form of myth in the Brahmanical literature.⁸⁸ This form of Buddhist practices were performed secretly till the period of Varmanas.

⁸⁵ G.W. Farrow and I. Menon '*The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra: With the Commentary Yogaratnamala*, op.cit., pp. 76-77; Kamakhya is sometime substitutes of Kamarupa, H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, op.cit., p. 339.

⁸⁶ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 332.

⁸⁷ H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, op.cit, p. 339.

⁸⁸ Tantric goddess Tara and Ugratara are said to have discovered and introduced from China or Tibet by Nagarjuna (*Arya-Nagarjunapadaiah Bhotesu uddhrtam*). It has been mentioned in the Brahmanical literature *Rudrayamala* and *Brahmayamala* that Vasistha brought the *Cina cara* (a particular mode of *Sadhana*) from Mahacina. For details, see P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., p. 225; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 303.

Buddhist tantricism became well established in Kamarupa with the ascendancy of Salastambha, who was probably follower of *Salistambha Sutra* of Mahayana Buddhism.⁸⁹

Inspired by the royal association of Buddhism from the days of Bhaskarvarmana, the new movement of Buddhism became visible in Assam after the generations of secret performers. Kamarupa emerged as one of the important centers of Vajrayana among the four Vajrayana centers as mentioned in *Hevajra Tantra* of the seventh century. The period after seventh century was marked by the development of tantric form of Buddhism in other parts of India and Tibet.⁹⁰ Gradually, tantric Buddhist scholars or Sahajiya Siddhas had developed a common bond of religious affinity between Orissa, Bengal, Nepal, Tibet and Assam and formed a wide cultural zone.⁹¹

As discussed in the preceding pages of the chapter, the beginning of Buddhism in Assam was very closely associated with the tantric practices. Hence, an analysis on the tantricism has been provided here.

II. Meaning of tantra:

Tantra is a generic term that denotes certain religious cult⁹² that occupies an important place in the cultural life of the people in India. The term 'tantra' is derived from Sanskrit root word 'Tan' which means to elongate or extend.⁹³ According to Monier-William's Sanskrit dictionary, the word 'Tantra' itself means 'loom' or 'warp'.⁹⁴ The word derived from a root meaning to spread and it applied to a variety of treatise by which knowledge is spread (*Tanyate vistaryate jnana, anena iti*

⁸⁹ The early Salastmbha rulers might have extended patronage to the Buddhist tantric establishment at Kamakhya as the older temple at Kamakhya which was once a Tantric Buddhist center dated back to 7th to 8th to eight century. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations, op.cit.*, p. 330.

⁹⁰ For details, see Dimbeswar Sarma, 'Trends of religion in Ancient Kamarupa', *The J.A.R.S.*, vol. xvi, 1962, p. 27.

⁹¹ The esoteric Buddhism transmitted to Tibet, Nepal, China and Nepal from India. Editors preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India, op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. Lxii.

⁹² R.N. Dandekar, 'Literature of Brahmanism in Sanskrit', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, The Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, Calcutta, second edition, 1978, vol. v, p. 42.

⁹³ Swami Pratyagatmanada, 'Tantra as a way of realization', *The Cultural Heritage of India, op.cit.*, p. 240.

⁹⁴ Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1899 reprint 1994, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, p. 436.

tantram).⁹⁵ The meaning of the term ‘*Tantra*’ is varied. In the Vedic texts, the term occurs in the sense of loom, and in the *Mimamsa* tradition, Tantra is an act of process or a method of doing or making something.⁹⁶ Tanticism represents a special aspect of the religious and cultural life of India.⁹⁷

There are some contradictory opinions about Tantra. Some scholars condemned the Tantra as magical, superstitious and obscene where as some considers it as scientific and profoundly spiritual. According to Charles Eliot, Tantricism is a species of religious magic rather than principle.⁹⁸ When the magical practices became extremely popular then it was incorporated by a section of people with their religious system. With the development of psychoanalysis, researchers on tantra have tried to establish *Tantra* as the manner of scientific realism.⁹⁹ Scholar opines that Tantra is a practical knowledge to extend the potentiality of individual human consciousness to achieve cosmic effulgence and liberation.¹⁰⁰ According to Lalan Prasad Singh, it is a scientific system of spiritual discipline based on human psychology.¹⁰¹ He further says ‘*Tantra* is that branch of esoteric cult which brings the realization of *tatta* (absolute) with the help of *mantra sadhana*’.¹⁰²

Scholarly depictions of the origin of tantricism are often varied. Connecting with the Vedic tradition, P.C. Bagchi regards Tantra as the culmination of the

⁹⁵ P.C. Bagchi, ‘Evolution of the Tantras’, *Swami Lokeshwarananda, Studies on the Tantras*, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1989, p. 6; Bhikhu Sangharakshita, ‘Buddhism’ in A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, op.cit., p. 92.

⁹⁶ As the word Tantra itself is related with to the concept of weaving (the dictionary gives; loom, thread web, fabric as synonymous. For details, see P.V. Bapat (ed.), *2500 years of Buddhism*, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India, May 24 1956, p. 375; S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 240.

⁹⁷ S.B. Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, Calcutta University, 1950, p. vii.

⁹⁸ Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, II, Rutledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p. 190.

⁹⁹ Pranshu Samdarshi, ‘The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions’ *The Delhi University Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 1, 2014, p. 91.

¹⁰⁰ David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p. 263.

¹⁰¹ Lalan Prasad Singh says that as scientific study of human mind has proved that it has a para-psychological power and a close and scientific analysis of such-psychological powers in Tantricism would prove any doubt that it has a scientific basis. For details, see Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, Concept Publishing, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰² Buddhist Tantra aware of the futility of a speculative philosophy and hence, it recommends the practice of institutional science and esoterism for the realization of the ultimate reality. For details, see Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 4.

esoteric science of the *Vedanta* and the *Sankhya* and observes the presence of some elements of *Vedas* in Tantra.¹⁰³ Chintaharan Chakravarty believes that the origin of the Tantra is associated with the primitive people as some uncanny syllables ‘*mantra*’, which is the elements of *tantra*, found among them.¹⁰⁴ Some other scholars also assign the psycho-sexual origin of tantricism.¹⁰⁵ D.P.Chattopadhyaya in his *Lokayata*, identifies tantricism with the early materialism and examines Tantric practices with agricultural rituals.¹⁰⁶ R.S. Sharma is of the opinion that the sexual rites which formed an important part in the agricultural rituals of tribal people was seized by the members of leisured upper classes and distorted to provide them sensual gratification with the development of the feudal structure of the society that reflected feudal social ethos and feudal cultural traits.¹⁰⁷ Some elements of tantricism such as mantras, magic, cult of fertility already existed in India and Buddhist had adapted and developed their esoteric practices associating with these elements.¹⁰⁸ Thus, tantricism received a great impetus from Buddhism which was referred to in a manner of rudimentary practices in the Vedic literatures.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Chintaharan Chakravarty, ‘Antiquity of Tantricism’, *I.H.Q.* March 1930, p. 118; P.C. Bagchi, ‘Evolution of Tantras,’ *The Cultural Heritage of India*, *op.cit.*, vol. iv, pp. 212-213.

¹⁰⁴ Chintaharan Chakravarty ‘Antiquity of Tantricism’, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁵ *Tantra* is associated with fertility rites or early agricultural rituals where human body was identified with the fecund cosmos and the union of male and female represented the union of earth and sky (rains) yielding fertility. Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, Sage Publications, 2003, p. 112.

¹⁰⁶ D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 269-358.

¹⁰⁷ R.S. Sharma ‘Material Milieu of Tantricism’, in *idem.*, (ed.), *Indian Society Historical Probing*, *op.cit.* p. 180; Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Making of early Medieval India*, Oxford University press, Delhi, 1994, p. 12; Devangana Desai, ‘Art under Feudalism in India’, *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. I, pt.1, 1974.

¹⁰⁸ According to Mircea Eliade, Tantra represents a much needed affirmation of sexuality and bodily existence, much older than the Vedic Aryan tradition with its patriarchal ideology; it is “great underground current of autochthonous and popular spirituality, “centering on the worship of the Mother Goddess, which later burst forth into mainstream Hindu and Buddhist traditions.” Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 203–5.

¹⁰⁹ B. Bhattacharya, ‘Tantrika culture among the Buddhists’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, p. 260; G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 181n.

Evolution of Buddhist Tantricism:

Though most of the scholars are of the opinion that Buddhist Tantricism emerged during the period of Mahayana, but there is presence of some magical practices in early Buddhism.¹¹⁰ It also holds that tantric practices were expounded by historical Buddha who recognised the *rddhis* or supernatural powers and mentioned four *iddhipadas* (Pali word *Iddhis* or *rddhii* means occult powers attainable through religious practices) conducive to the attainment of supernatural powers.¹¹¹ It is also opined that Buddha himself practiced *asphanakayoga* (yoga of psychic expansion) when he was in search of the eternal truth.¹¹² The Buddhist tantra attached to Mahayana tradition. Textual sources suggest that the seeds of esoterism were inherent in the scriptures of Mahayana period.¹¹³ Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhyamika School of Mahayana also regarded as the real exponent of Buddhist esoterism.¹¹⁴

Waddell has suggested that magic and mostly of a sympathetic kind seems to have crept in to Indian Buddhism soon after Buddha's death in the form of the acquisition of supernatural power.¹¹⁵

B. Bhattacharya and Charles Eliot have traced that the development of Buddhist esoterism to the time of Maitreya and Asanga that flourished about last decades of third or early decades of fourth century C.E.¹¹⁶ Early Mahayana works suggested that the seeds of esotericism were inherent in the scriptures of the early Mahayana period. The first book to inculcate Vajrayana philosophy was

¹¹⁰ B. Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists', *op.cit.*, pp. 262-263; *idem.*, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Irma KLM Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1958, p. 10; L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

¹¹¹ Some practices are *chando* (will), *viriyam* (effort), *cittam* (thought), and *vimamsa* (investigation). For details, see R.C. Childers, *Dictionary of the Pali language*, p.157 as referred in B. Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture Among the Buddhists', *op.cit.*, p. 260.

¹¹² Rajendralal Mitra (ed.), *Lalita Vistara*, p. 315, as referred in L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

¹¹³ N.N. Bhattacharya, *History of the Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical Study*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1982, p. 217.

¹¹⁴ Lalan Prasad Singh *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, Allen&Com, London, 1895, p. 476.

¹¹⁶ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 12; Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p. 87.

Gurhyasamaja Tantra, which was composed about 300 C.E.¹¹⁷ The Vajrayana philosophy and practices are also scattered in the body of the text of *Manjusrimulakalpa*, the work of pre-*Guhyasamaja*.¹¹⁸

In India, Buddhist tantricism in its initial shape existed entirely outside the established Buddhist monastic framework. The esoteric doctrine and practices (*Tantra Sadhana*) were kept secret (*gurya*) and had been forbidden to preach them publicly. From the very early times, it transmitted in a secret manner from the time of Asanga to the time of Dharmakirti (625 C.E.-667 C.E.).¹¹⁹ However, it no longer remained secret. During post Guptas and Bhaktas, Buddhism with its tantric form was well established in India and the teaching of tantra was included in the curriculum in Buddhist universities.¹²⁰ Thus, though the elements of Tantricism were in early Buddhism it developed with Mahayana Buddhism but got impetus after seventh century C.E.

There are varieties of methods in Tantra practice that were adopted from different sources. Buddhism incorporated all sorts of popular practices in their ethico-religious system. Buddhist tantricism attaches importance to four elements 1. *mantra* (hymn) 2. *mudra* (physical gesture) 3. *mandala* (circle of deities) and 4. *abhisekha* (initiation) etc. associated with it.¹²¹ The tantric practice can be divided into two groups viz. the left and the right handed practices. The left handed *tantra* (*vam marg*)¹²² incorporated the five sacraments (*pancamakarapuja*) with the ritual use of the forbidden five 'm' – *mamsa* (meat), *madya* (alcohol), *matsya* (fish), *mudra*

¹¹⁷ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 525; S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

¹¹⁸ The doctrine of five Dhyanis Buddhas or even their names, Mudras, Saktis colour and directions are all absent in the *Manjusrimulakalpa*. For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁹ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

¹²⁰ *Tantra* studies are imparted in the universities such as Nalanda, Vikramsila and Jogaddala, at Nalanda and Santaraksita worked as professor of *Tantra*. B. Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, p. 530.

¹²¹ For details, see S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 252-253; S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, Firma KLM Calcutta, 1949 (1st edn.) reprint 1995 Firma KLM, p. 23.

¹²² *Vama* means woman and *acara* means practice. *Vamacara* thus stands for the ritual practices associates with woman. For details, see D. P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata : A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, *op.cit.*, p. 278.

(physical gesture) and *maithuna* (sex-play).¹²³ In course of time, Tantric masters developed elaborate rituals and the sexo- yogic practice¹²⁴ came to be held as the most important esoteric practice for the attainment of the final stage of supreme bliss. Some other elements viz. *muhurta*, *tithi*, along with *naksatra*, (star) *rasi* (zodiacal symbol) were also incorporated with the development of Kalacakra tantra. Thus, the practice of astronomy and astrology came to be associated with it.¹²⁵

Sakti (female aspect or mother goddess) worship has been regarded as the inevitable principles of esoteric practice for obtaining emancipation since the very origin of the *Tantra*.¹²⁶ The inclination of Buddhism towards female cult was first revealed in *Gurhyasamajatantra*.¹²⁷ Some *dharanis* of Mahayana work i.e. *Lotussutra* or *Sadharmapundarika*, compiled between first and second century C.E. also addressed to female deities.¹²⁸ *Gurhya Samaja Tantra* introduced worship of five dhyanis Buddhas. Gradually, worship of vast and large numbers of pantheons became the characteristic features of Tantrika Buddhism.¹²⁹

The origin and development of tantricism is generally associated with a phenomenon of the non-Aryan dominated areas.¹³⁰ P.C. Bagchi observes that the heterodox¹³¹ school of tantra associated with some non –Aryan groups of people like

¹²³ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste.*, op.cit., p. 111; L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit. pp. 13 & 47-50.

¹²⁴ N.B. Buddhist Tantra does not encourage sexual indulgence rather it lays down very strict rules and severe discipline. The mystic union of *Prajna* and *Upaya* represents the complete transformation of ordinary sense desires. For details, see L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 11.

¹²⁵ P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of the Tantras', in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., p. 220.

¹²⁶ Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1967, p. 279f ; L. P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 36; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, op.cit., p. 526.

¹²⁷ B. Bhattacharya. 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., p. 264.

¹²⁸ Naresh Mantri, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies*, vol. xx, no .1, 1971, pp. 152-153 as cited in Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 334 .

¹²⁹ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., p. 265.

¹³⁰ R. S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of Tantricism,' op.cit., p. 188.

¹³¹ The Tantra can be broadly divided in to two classes- orthodox and heterodox. The orthodox Tantras mainly represented by Agamas, the Yamalas and their supplements. The heterodox school represented by both the followers of Buddhism and Brahmanism and a numbers of schools such as Kulacara, Vamacara, Vajrayana etc. For details, see P.C Bagchi, 'On foreign elements in the Tantra', op.cit., p. 2.

Pulinda, Kirata, Abhira, Kuntala and accordingly some areas, outside India such as Balhika(Balkh), the hill of tribes Kirata (Himalayan zone), Bhota (Tibet), Cina (China), Mahacina (Mongolia) dominated by tantric culture. He, thus, views that Tantricism was not born in India.¹³² It is because of having the regular intercourse of mystics, exchange of ideas and practices with different land, some foreign elements (Tibetan) are visible in *Tantras*. The female principle which occupies an important place in tantra was widely prevalent in the tribal dominated areas where women clearly enjoyed a higher status. D.P. Chattopadhyaya looks the base of tantric tradition in ancient tribal collectivism and connects the tantric rites with early agricultural rituals where woman played a dominant role.¹³³

Kamarupa was a center of activities of people who have been coming down from the Northern and North –eastern Hills since the earliest times and accordingly the area was associated with Tantrika ideas.¹³⁴ It is believed that Buddhist Tantricism originally associated with Bon religion of Tibet and later it transmitted from Tibet to Eastern India, particularly Bengal and Assam, which were connected with Eastern Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan.¹³⁵ Based on Tibetan authorities, scholars hold the opinion that Tantric Buddhism originated in Uddiyana.¹³⁶ Though it is generally accepted that Oddiyana was situated in Swat Valley in the North¹³⁷ (modern Pakistan), B. Bhattacharya shows the probability of the location of the site near Kamarupa and from this region (Vanga and Samatata), it spread to other places in India.¹³⁸ Scholar also holds that Buddhist *Mantrayana* based on the *Tantras* is

¹³² *Ibid.* pp. 2-12.

¹³³ Tantric practitioner identified the human body with the cosmos and emphasized the male-female intercourse as the basis of life and the fertility of soil and earth itself. For details, see D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, *op.cit.*, pp. 269-350; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

¹³⁴ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

¹³⁵ Nagendra Narayan Choudhary in a paper on the 'Home of Tantricism' (modern Review, 1934) as referred in see K.L Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, 1934, vol. II, p. 5.

¹³⁶ L.M. Joshi, *Journal of Oriental Institute*, Boroda, vol. xvi, no. 3, 1967, pp. 223-232 as referred in Hajime Nakamura *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 314; Bhattacharya Benoytosh, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

¹³⁷ Hajime Nakamura *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 314.

¹³⁸ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 16; *idem.*, 'Origin and development of Vajrayana', *I.H.Q.*, vol. iii, 1927, pp. 745-746.

originated in Andhras and from Andhra and Kalinga, the Buddhist Tantras spread to Vanga and Magadha where Nalanda developed as a center of the study of Tantra during the reign of the Palas.¹³⁹ Whatever is the place of origin of Buddhist Tantricism, but Kamarupa was among one of the four Tantric Vajrayana centers mentioned in *HevajraTantra*, the work of 7th century C.E.¹⁴⁰

Introduction of Buddhist Tantricism in Assam:

It has been already mentioned that Tantricism is generally associated with non-Aryan groups and tribal dominated areas.¹⁴¹ Assam is the homeland of the Austric and Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid trait that is traditionally known as Kirata.¹⁴² This Austric and Tibet-Burmans formed the basis of Tantricism in Assam, which passed on into the various religious faiths.¹⁴³ They associated with phallic cult, magic and charms centering this lithic culture on what are called fetishism and this contributed to the origin and development of tantricism.¹⁴⁴

It is to mention here that female principle which occupies an important place in Tantra, widely prevailed among some of the tribes in Assam since earliest period.¹⁴⁵ Buddhist group came in touch with prevailing magic, fertility cult and matrilineal society and developed tantricism.

Tara is one of the most important female deities with whom Buddhists (both Mahayana and Vajrayana) are associated.¹⁴⁶ The early Mahayana work (second or third century C.E) i.e. *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, where there is the indication of the

¹³⁹ A.K.Warder, *IndianBuddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 485-488 as referred in R.S. Sharma 'Material Milieu of Tantricism,' *op.cit.*, p. 184.

¹⁴⁰ For details, see D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, p. 12; B. Bhattacharya (ed.), *Sadhanamala*, vol. II, *op.cit.*, p. 455.

¹⁴¹ P.C Bagchi, 'On foreign elements in the Tantra, *op.cit.*, p.4; D.N. Jha, *Early India*, *op.cit.*, p. 205.

¹⁴² Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'Kirata-Jana-Kirti', *J.R.A.S.B.*, vol. xiv no. 1, 1948, p. 167; K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Lawyers Book Stall Publications, Guwahati, 1960, p. 2.

¹⁴³ P.C. Choudhary, *History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century AD*, *op.cit.*, p. 390.

¹⁴⁴ P.C. Choudhary says 'The origin of Saktism and Tantric Buddhist cults, common to Assam, Bengal and Orissa is to be attributed to the phallic cults magic and charms centering this lithic culture on what is called fetishism.' P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁶ In Vajrayana, the four female deities are known as *Caturdevi* are *Locana*, *Mamaki*, *Pandara* and *Tara*. Among them, Tara became most prominent. Naresh Mantri, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies*, vol. xx, no. 1, 1971, pp. 152-153 referred in Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 334-335.

development of the tantrika conception¹⁴⁷ refers Kamarupa as a fertilizing soil for the development of the Tara formula.¹⁴⁸

Following is the verse of *Manjusrimulakalpa* that refers to the prevalence of the Tara deity in Kamarupa:

*'Bhogakameih tada satya tasmi kale yogadhame
Yaksarat Taradevyā tu sadhyatu pustikamata
Krodhanastu tatha mantrah sadhyatan dakshinpathe
Mlechhataskardvipesu abhugadharmadhya aba va
Sidhyate cha tada Tara Yaksarat chaiva marabala
Harikale karmarange cha Kamarupe kalachaheya'*¹⁴⁹

The above mentioned verse reveals that the practices of *Taramantra* at the places viz. Harikela, Karmarupa, Yaksarat and Kamarupa, achieve good result.¹⁵⁰ Harikela represents the Cittagaon region. From this verse of *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, it can be presumed that in the eastern part of India prevailed the practice of *Taramantra*.

Taranatha also refers about the prevalence of Tara deity in the manner that when Asvabhaha¹⁵¹ came to preach Mahayana Buddhism in Kamarupa; he was attacked by the poisonous *Ajagara* (python) snakes and with the help of the spell of *Tara mantra* he could save himself.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, p. 526; *idem.*, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, pp. 263 & 272.

¹⁴⁸ B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004, p. 32.

¹⁵⁰ Maheswar Neog (ed.), *Banikanta Rasanawali*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, 1991, p. 189.

¹⁵¹ Asvabhaha was a Buddhist scholar of fifth century C.E (c.450C.E. – 530 C.E). He wrote a commentary on the *Mahayana Samgraha*, and this commentary was translated by Hieun-Tsang in to Chinese in ten volumes. For details, see Hajime Nakamura *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 264 & 274-276.

¹⁵² Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, p. 253.

Myth and Historicity of Tantricism

The early history of the religion of Kamarupa is full of myths and legends that developed with the backdrop of the prevailing beliefs and practices. The traces of the introduction of Tara deity and the successive course of the development of Tantricism were recorded in *Brahmanical Sakta* literatures in the form of myths. Tantric goddess Tara and Ugratara are said to have been discovered and introduced from China or Tibet by Nagarjuna (*Arya-Nagarjunapadaiah Bhotesu uddhrtam*).¹⁵³ In the Brahmanical literature, Nagarjuna¹⁵⁴ was replaced by Vasistha and portrayed that Vasistha was responsible for the introduction of Tara deity.¹⁵⁵ In the words of P.C. Bagchi, 'Siddha Nagarjuna and Vasistha play the same role in importing the cult either from Bhota or Mahacina (countries which may be considered identical)'.¹⁵⁶ The Vasistha legends which occupy an important place in *Kalikapurana*, is associated with the importation of Tara deity.¹⁵⁷ Tara Tantra was adopted by both Hinduism and Buddhism.¹⁵⁸ However, Buddhist literary source *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* throws the light that in Kamarupa, Tara deity was associated with Buddhist group much earlier than Hinduism.

It has been mentioned in the Brahmanical works *Brahma Yamala* and *Rudra Yamala*, that Vasistha, after years of hard discipline, failing in his efforts to obtain success (*Siddhi*), cursed Tara.¹⁵⁹ The *Rudrayamala* and *Brahmayamala*

¹⁵³ P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, p. 225; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁵⁴ In India, the name 'Nagarjuna' has been associated with different history of different periods with varied activities. He is portrayed sometime as Madhyamika philosopher, sometime with Tantric adepts or as medical practitioner in the literatures from first century to 12th century. Thus, some scholars believe that there are at least three Nagarjuna that had been associated with Mahayana Buddhism in different periods of history. For details, see Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-80.

¹⁵⁵ It has mentioned in *Brahmayamala*, *Rudrayamala* and *Kalikapurana* that Vasistha brought mystic formula of Taratantra from Mahacina. B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 33; G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 280.

¹⁵⁶ P.C. Bagchi, 'Review of Sadhanamala', *I. H.Q.*, vol. vi, 1930, p. 585.

¹⁵⁷ The Vasistha legend made to stand at the cross roads of political and social changes in Assamese and conveniently utilized to explain the emergence of new evidence in history. B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Hindus had borrowed deities such as, Mahacinatara, Janguli, and Vajrayogini from the Buddhist and incorporated them in to their own under the names of Tara, Manasa and Chinnamasta respectively. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op. cit.*, p.1.

¹⁵⁹ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, pp.279-280

narrate that Brahma's son Vastisha, who worshipped the goddess with austerities unsuccessfully for a long time, is advised by the goddess herself to go to the Buddhist country Mahacina. In Cina, he encountered the Buddha surrounded by women, drinking wine, eating meat and engaging in sexual acts, and is initiated in the *kula* path.¹⁶⁰ The same story is also referred in *Brahmayamala* with little variation that Vasistha went to the Nilachala Hill for necessary penance and meditation and when once again he found no result, cursed goddess *Buddheswari*.¹⁶¹ In one episode of *Kalikapurana* it has mentioned that Vasistha pronounced curse on goddess Ugratara along with Mahadeva and Gana (hosts).¹⁶² It was also mentioned in *Yoginitantra* that when Vasistha came to Nilachala to worship Tara then Naraka was busy with the worshipping with another *Mandala*. Vasistha was prevented by Naraka and so the former pronounced a curse on Kamakhya.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ A.K. Maitreya, the editor of the *Taratantra* gives quotations from the *Rudrayamala* which narrate the story of Vasistha who practiced austerities on the Nilacala Hill and was advised by the goddess to go Mahacina, the country of the Buddhas for having highest knowledge. According to *Rudrayamala* version, Vasistha thereupon went to China where he was found the Buddha who delivered before him a lecture on the duties of the Kaulas and explained to him their mysteries and utility and acquainted him with the secret rites and practices connected therewith. Vasistha was fully convinced and followed the way of the Buddha and eventually attained final liberation. A.K. Maitra(ed.), *Tatatanta*, Varendra Research Society, Rajsahi, 1913, pp.1-2; N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, op.cit., p.124; J. Woodroffe, *Sakti and Sakta*, Ganesh & Company, 1927, Madras: 8th edition, 1975, 127-8; A. Bharati, *The tantric tradition*, Rider and Company, London, 1965, pp.69-70.

¹⁶¹ B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p.31. For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, op.cit., p.124.

¹⁶² Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Barua(ed.), *Kalikapurana*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati, 2007, ch81, p.300; Biswanarayan Sastri(ed.), *Kalikapurana Murtivinirdesha*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, p.xxvii; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p.18.

¹⁶³ Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua(eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua 1994, pp.162-172; Bani Kanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp.16-18.

In the above cited myths the deities viz. *Tara*, *Ugratara*,¹⁶⁴ *Buddheswari* and *Kamakhya* represent the same deity and the composers used to delineate the same story. Buddhist sources say that in Kamarupa the worship of Tara was prevailed several hundred years before the evolution of Kamakhya at Nilachala, or the composition of the myth in *Kalikapurana*.¹⁶⁵

Both *Kalikapurana*¹⁶⁶ and *Yogini Tantra* mention that Kamakhya (the existing deity) had to suffer eclipse 300 years after the curse.¹⁶⁷ *Kalikapurana* mentions that after the curse of Vasistha on Ugratara, the deity would be worshipped

¹⁶⁴ It is to mention here that Buddhist goddess Tara, entered in to Hindu fold as Ugra Tara. Mahacinakrama Tara or Ugratara is a special form of Tara was imported from Buddhist Tantric pantheon into Hindu pantheon. P.C. Bagchi, says “Mahacina-Tara, as can be ascertained from the Buddhist sadhanas, was the same goddess as Ekajata whose cult is said to have been discovered by Siddha Nagarjuna in Tibet. The description of Ekajata is found in six different Buddhist sadhanas. It closely agrees with that of *Mahacina-Tara*, as found in some of the *sadhanas*. A comparison of the two goddesses essentially identical, the only difference being found in the *bija-mantra* which, in the case of Mahacina-Tara, is composed of three letters and, in the case of Ekajata, is sometimes composed of four, sometimes of five. Corresponding to these goddesses, we find in the Hindu pantheon Tara, Ugra-Tara, Ekajata, and Maha-Nila- Sarasvati. The dhyanas of these goddesses, as found in the Hindu Tantras, literally correspond to those found in the Buddhist sadhana.” P.C. Bagchi, ‘Evolutin of the Tantra’ in Swami Lokeshwarananda, *Studies on the Tantras*, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture Calcutta, 1989, p. 23; Biswanarayan Sastri, ‘Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam, *J.A.R.S.*, xxxii, p. 4; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p. 19; Gurdrum Buhneemann, ‘The Goddess Mahacinakrama-Tara (Ugra-Tara) in Buddhist and Hindu Tantricism’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 59, no. 3, 1966, p. 472.

¹⁶⁵ Apart from the mythical royal association of Kamakya with Naraka, there is not even a veiled reference to Mother Goddess or ‘*Devi*’ in the royal inscription till the ninth century C.E. The Hinduised deity Kameswara Mahagauri and Mahagauri Kameswara that are identified by scholars as Kamakhya at Nilachala, first time appeared in the royal inscriptions around 9th to 11th century. In the Tezpur Copper Plates Inscription of Vanamala, in line 10 -12 it had mentioned “at the top of which there is a residence of the illustrious god Kameswara and the goddess Mahagauri’. In the line 49 of Guwakuchi grant of Indrapala (c1071 C.E) also mention *Mahagauri –Kamesvarayoh*. The mention of the place Kamkutagiri in the Tezpur Copper Plates Inscription of Vanamala identifies by scholars as present Bamuni Hill, to the east of modern Tezpur. For details, see M.M.Sarma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, pp. 104, 112; P.C. Choudhary takes Kamakuta to be identical with Nilachala where Kamakhya is worshipped. P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve Century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 420.

¹⁶⁶ It has mentioned in *Kalikapurana* that Vasistha came to visit Kamakhya at Nilachala but Naraka prevented the former; irate Vasistha cursed Naraka that Kamakhya would disappear with all her attendants till Naraka to be killed by Vishnu. Jyotindra Narayan Datta Barua (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, *op.cit.*, p. 131 Chapter 39.

¹⁶⁷ Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, *op.cit.*, pp. 162-172; Bani Kanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-18.

by *Vamacara*¹⁶⁸ and would be followed by Mlecchas.¹⁶⁹ These myths thus indicate that after three hundred years of secrecy (disappearance) the deity would be worshipped by *Vamacara* practice and it would follow by Mlecchas. Buddhist sources mention about the development of Buddhist Tantricism that *Tantrika* ideas had been handed down from Gurus to disciples secretly for nearly three hundred years after Nagarjuna.¹⁷⁰ The seventeenth century Buddhist scholar Taranatha says ‘When the *Tantras* were handed down from *Guru* to disciples secretly for nearly three hundred years, they got publicity through the mystic teachings, songs and miracles of the *Siddhas*, *Nathas* and *Yogis*’.¹⁷¹ Tantra, in its earliest form, was a distinctly iconoclastic, private, and esoteric practice. This practice (*Tantra Sadhana*) was kept in secret (*Gurya*),¹⁷² and had been forbidden to preach them doctrine publicly. In course of time, Tantricism no longer remained secret as the teaching of Vajrayana at that period became well established and widely spread through the mystic songs by Buddhist Siddhas.¹⁷³ Thus, the myths that developed from two different religious trends (one from Buddhist and another from Hindu tantric literature) represent the successive development of Buddhist Tantricism that will follow in this discussion.

¹⁶⁸ The Origin of the *Vamacara* practices goes back to Buddhism that associates with Indo-Mongoloid life. There is a great similarity between Vajrayana and *Vamacari*. S.K Chatterji, ‘Contributions from different language culture group’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-1, *op.cit.*, p. 90; Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

N.B. ‘As early as in 1874 Rasik Mohan Chatterjee brought out a series of Hindu Tantric texts from Bengal manuscripts and published them in Bengali script. Among the works he brought out were Brahmananda’s *Tarahasya*, the *Rudrayamala* and the *Mahacinacakramana*, all of which refer to *Vamacara* practices connected with the worship of Tara as being brought by the sage Vasistha who was instructed by Buddha himself” cited in N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*, p. 124.

¹⁶⁹ Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Barua (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, *op.cit.*, ch. 81, p. 300; Biswanarayan Sastri (ed), *Kalikapurana Murtivinirdesha*, *op.cit.*, p. xxv.

¹⁷⁰ S. R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

¹⁷¹ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, ‘Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, p. 263.

¹⁷² Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁷³ The Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas who flourished mainly from the 10th to 12th centuries, composed Caryapadas in the vernacular that can immediately intelligible by the common man. S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 50; Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

In the light of the above discussion it may be said that Tara was existing deity (or introduced in the land) during the period of semi legendary ruler Naraka.¹⁷⁴ Scholar placed the period of Naraka prior to fourth century C.E.¹⁷⁵ It has already been referred in this chapter that Kamarupa was a prominent place of the worship of Tara that is mentioned in the Buddhist work of third century C.E. *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*.¹⁷⁶ However, initially Buddhists performed their esoteric practice secretly. Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hieun Tsang, who visited the land in the mid of seventh century, left an account where he cited about the prevailing condition of Buddhism in contemporary Kamarupa. He refers that ‘whatever Buddhist there were in it (Kamarupa), performed their acts of devotion secretly’.¹⁷⁷ It must have some esoteric forms or a tantric form that was referred by Hieun Tsang. Nirode Baruah based on this comment of Hieun Tsang says that “These secret pockets of Buddhism may be identified with places like Jogighopa, Pancharatna, Suryapahar, Vadokugiri where Buddhist stupas and caves have been discovered.”¹⁷⁸

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Kamarupa became a center of Tantric form of Buddhism by the seventh-eight centuries. At that period Tara was

¹⁷⁴ N.B. The deity Tara was already introduced in India because the worship of Tara became popular as early as the fifth-6th century C.E. Hieun Tsang who visited India during the 7th century C.E., saw many Tara images in northern India. The reference of Tara mantra also found in *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* of third century C.E. For details, see *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 318; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, ‘Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., pp. 263 & 272.

¹⁷⁵ Pushyavarman, the founder of Varman dynasty, was the successor of Naraka. Thus, the period of Naraka may be placed between the end of third century or early fourth century. For details, see A.M. Sastri, ‘Fresh Light on the History of Prajyotisha: was PushyaVarman was son of Naraka’, *The J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxxiv, no. 1 & 2, 1995, pp. 32-35; Gajendra Adhikary, *Religious Establishment of Studies in Their Socio-Economic Background of Assam*, Candra Prakash, Guwahat, 2006, p. 6; J.B. Bhattacharya, *Bhauma-Naraka Legend and state Formation in PragjyotishaKamarupa*, North East India History Association, Shillong, 2004, p. 37.

¹⁷⁶ Benoytosh Bhattacharya is of the opinion that *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* which has been published by T.Ganapati Sastri in the Tribundrum Sanskrit Series, belongs to very early period. He argues that the work must be class among the Vaipulya sutras which became extinct about 4th and fifth century C.E. For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, ‘Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., pp. 263 & 272; *idem.*, (ed.), *Two Vajrayana Works (Jnasidhi of Indrabhuti, and Pagyapayavinichayasidhi of Anangavraja)*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. 44, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1929, p. x.

¹⁷⁷ T. Watters., T.W. Rhy Davids & S.W. Bushell (eds.), *On Yuan Chwang’s travels in India*, vol. ii London, 1904, vol. II, p. 186; referred in H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, op.cit., p. 333; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit, p. 295.

¹⁷⁸ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2010, p. 117.

worshipped as *Mahacina Sweta Tara* and *Sambara Heruka* at Kamakhya (about the seventh-eight centuries) as a part of tantric practice within Buddhism.¹⁷⁹ Similar to the Brahmanical myths, about the duration of the period, it needed approximately three hundred years from the period of mantra practice of Tara to the development of Tantricism with the deity *Mahacina Sweta Tara* in Kamarupa.

The Tantra tradition, which was esoteric tradition initially, was later popularized among the common masses. Buddhism became a popular religion among the Mlechhas¹⁸⁰ and some of the professional classes. *Mleccha* is a very wide term means an outcaste or a very low man, which was used by the Aryan Brahmins to stand for all-non- Aryans.¹⁸¹ The professional caste Dom, who had engaged in various professions occupied the lower status in the framework of *Varnasramadharama*, embraced Buddhism.¹⁸² Some Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas who hail from the region namely Saraha or Minnatha are said to have belonged to *Sudra*¹⁸³ or fishermen community respectively.¹⁸⁴ Minnatha was followed by the people of different professions *Hali* (a peasant), *Mali* (a gardener), and *Tambuli* (a tooth painter).¹⁸⁵ Another indigenous community lived in the valley of Brahmaputra

¹⁷⁹ For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁸⁰ Bharati Barua, 'Secular Approach by the Ancient Kings of Pragjyotish: A Study', *The J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxxvi, nos. 1 & 2, 1997, published in 2003, p. 25; It was also found mentioned in neo-Vaisnave literature, *Vyasasrama* that degraded form of Buddhism followed among the Mlecchas. *Vamsigopal Carit* as referred in Maheswa Neog, *Maheswar Neog Rachanavali*, vol. iv Chandra Prakash, 2008, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸¹ It is considered by the scholar that due to following of un – Aryan way of life of the family of Salastambha earned some degree of social degradation and derogatory designation as mlecchas M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 34; P.C. Choudhary, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century A.D.*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

N.B. *Kalikapurana* mentions that Mlechhas were the worshipper of Tara and Ekjata. Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Barua (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, *op.cit.* pp. 300-301.

¹⁸² Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parisad, Guwahati, 1972, p. 142.

¹⁸³ Giuseppe Tucci mentions on the basis of Tibetan work *Grub-to'b*, Rahula alias Saraha was a Sudra from Kamarupa *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xxvi, p. 141, as referred in K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, 1934, n. -2, p. 47.

¹⁸⁴ For details, see, Bhupendranath Datta (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, Ramkrishan Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 1957, p. 74.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

that is known as i.e. *Yogi* or *Katani*.¹⁸⁶ They engaged in different profession¹⁸⁷ and influenced by the Buddhist *Sahajiya* Siddhas. During the period of Pala rulers of Kamarupa, this Yogi community formed a religious community that came to known as Nathas in later period.¹⁸⁸

Thus, from the above discussion, it is clear that in earliest period Buddhists performed their practices in form of stupa worship and mantra practices and by the seventh century C.E. Kamarupa became one of the main four Vajranaya centers in eastern India.

The period after seventh century was also marked by the development of tantric form of Buddhism in neighbouring areas of Kamarupa. In India, in the early period, Vajrayana was practiced outside the monastery but by the beginning of eight century Vajrayana rapidly grew in Bengal and Bihar under the patronage of Pala rulers of Bengal.¹⁸⁹ Several major monastic complexes of Vajrayanist in orientation (Odanta-pura and Vikramaslla and Somapura) were built under their patronage.¹⁹⁰ Buddhism also found its way in Tibet by the seventh century C.E., with the efforts of its ruler Sron-btsm-sgm-Po, who maintained a close contact with India.¹⁹¹ In succeeding period, with the efforts of Santaraksita and Padmasambhaba, Lamaism (Buddhism of its modifying old practices) was established in Tibet in the eight century C.E.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Dibrugarh, 2008, p. 110.

¹⁸⁷ *Yogi* or *Katani* engaged in different profession such as, drum –beating, palanquin bearing, quackery and snake charming etc. During the period of Ahom rule, they were mainly associated with the rearing of pat silk worms and spinning of silk thread and they now became agriculturist people. S.L.Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Monoharlal. New Delhi, 2003, p. 16.

¹⁸⁸ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, pp. 110-120.

¹⁸⁹ Nalanda became the cradle of Buddhist logic and Mahayana philosophy during Pala period. Satkari Mukherji, 'Buddhism in Indian life and thought', in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, pp. 581-582.

¹⁹⁰ Sukumar Dutta, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India*, George Allen and Unwinds, London, 1962, p. 349.

¹⁹¹ *The Way of the Buddha*, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

¹⁹² Lamaism based mainly on the rigorous intellectual disciplines of *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara* philosophy utilizes the symbolic ritual practices of Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism). *The New Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2, 15th edition, 2007, p. 756. For detail, see P.V. Bapat, 'School and sects of Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 501; L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

Assam enjoyed close geographical proximity where Buddhism had developed. It has already been mentioned in the chapter1 of this dissertation that Pundravardhana became a part of early Assam. Buddhism had made considerable headway in the Pundra region in early period.¹⁹³ Vanga which also became one of the important centers of Buddhism was one of the neighbour of Assam.¹⁹⁴

Buddhism in Assam was closely associated with Tibet.¹⁹⁵ Mahayana Buddhist deity Tara which was worshipped in Kamarupa is said to have discovered and introduced from Cina and Mahacina by Nagarjuna.¹⁹⁶ Cina and Mahacina are usually regarded as identical and Sircar identified Cina with Tibet and Mahacina with China.¹⁹⁷ Ekajata or Mahacinakrama-Tara was worshipped by native inhabitants of Tibet probably professing the Bon religion of Tibet.¹⁹⁸ Scholars also try to show the link of Tara deity and its Tantric way with China. The Taoist sexual theories and practices which were flourishing between the second and the sixth centuries in China were re imported by the Buddhists.¹⁹⁹ Bhaskarvarman shows his interest also showed his interest to Taoism.²⁰⁰ Tibetan Buddhists attached with some religious places of Kamarupa such as Hajo and Kamakhya and still visit that places. Buddhist from Tibet come to offer their worship to Vairocana deity at Kamakhya in the mid of January to mid of February (month of *Magh*).²⁰¹ Archeological evidence

¹⁹³ B.N. Choudhary, *Buddhist Centers in Ancient India*, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 5-6 & 194.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6 & 194.

¹⁹⁵ Dimbeswar Sarma, 'Trends of religion in Ancient Kamarupa, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹⁶ For details see P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, p. 225.

¹⁹⁷ A. Bharati is of the opinion that Cina and Mahacina included the entire region to the north of the Himalayas, Tibet and at least parts of Mongolia and western China. A. Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, Rider and Company, London, 1965, pp. 61 & 79; D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1971, pp. 103-4;

¹⁹⁸ Gurdrum Buhemann, 'The Goddess Mahacinakrama-Tara (Ugra-Tara) in Buddhist and Hindu Tantricism', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 472-475.

¹⁹⁹ J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Cambridge, 1956, II, pp. 427-428.

²⁰⁰ When the envoys of the Tang dynasty, Li Yi Piao and Wang Huan Tse (643 C.E.- 646 C.E) came to India, Bhaskar asked the former to send a Sanskrit translation of *Tao- Toh kin* (the bible of Taoism) in 644 C.E and a portrait of Lao-Tse. The work was translated with the help of Yuan Chwang and some Taoist teachers and was sent to Bhaskarvarman. P.C. Bagchi, *India and China*, p. 200f as cited in P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 356; N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

²⁰¹ This information is collected from Jaleswar Sarma of Kamakhya premise.

also suggests about the association of Tibetans with Tara deity at Nilachala. Though the present Tara temple at Nilachala Kamakhya was constructed in 18th century, the original single piece stone of the gate of Tara temple is supposed to be assigned to the pre-Ahom period. The sculpture in stone below the gate of Tara temple at Kamakhya is of Tibetan or Chinese style.²⁰²

The close link between Assam and Tibet is further attested by the position of Hajo. Tibetan Buddhists are attached with their belief and faith with Hajo, the place that situated at 20 kilometer from Gauhati on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Hajo, the abode of Tantric Buddhist deity *Hayagriva*²⁰³ is regarded by Buddhists of Tibet and Bhutan as one of the most sacred places of worship and still they visit the place and pay homage. Even, the sanctity of Hajo is shown by the fact that the first monastery at Tibet was built with the clods of earth from Hajo.²⁰⁴

A tradition that followed among the Lamas of Tibet that there is a most holy place of Buddhist pilgrimage called '*Tsam-ch'o-dun*', next to the great temple at Buddha Gaya, situated in Assam.²⁰⁵ In *Jaschke's Tibetan Dictionary*, the name '*rTsamch'og-gron*' is defines as 'a town in west Assam where Buddha died.'²⁰⁶ Waddell is of the view that Lama who had the scanty geographical knowledge and who had translated the Pali place name identified 'Kusinagara' the place of death of Buddha as Sualkuchi.²⁰⁷ Csoma de Koros also holds that the death of Buddha happened in Assam near the city of Kusa or Kamarupa'.²⁰⁸ However, many Lamaistic traditions were associated with Hajo, located near Sualkuchi. Waddell opines that the Buddhists formerly occupied one of the hillocks at Hajo but were displaced by the Brahmans.²⁰⁹

²⁰² For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit, p. 18.

²⁰³ Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 69.

²⁰⁴ Maheswar Neog, *Religion of North- East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 36-37.

²⁰⁵ L. A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, op.cit., pp. 307-308.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-308.

²⁰⁷ The term of the place name Kusanagara means the town of *Kusa* grass. The early Lama missionaries in their translation, translated all the Sanskrit and Pali names literally in to Tibetan. Kusanagara was rendered in the 'Kah-gyur' cannon as '*rTsa-mch'og-gron*' from '*rtsa-mch'og*' Kusa grass, 'grog' a town (Sans. Nagara). For details, see L. Austine Waddell, *Lamaism*, op.cit., pp. 308.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 309; P. C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 294.

Buddhists of Tibet and Bhutan regarded *Hayagriva –Madhava* temple at Hajo, as one of the sacred places of worship. Inside the temple, the installed image which is called Hayagriva –Madhava is also considered by the Buddhist Lama from Bhutan and Tibet as Mahamuni.²¹⁰ Many sites surrounding Hajo were associated with Buddhist faith and belief including the images. Waddell observes that some of the rock cut inscriptions in that area bears Tibetan characters of the mystic sentences, ' *Om Mani Padme Hum*,' ' *Om Ah Hum* ', etc. In a rock there is also curved a figure four –armed Vishnu and the rock is called as *Letai Dhubunir Pat*.²¹¹ Padmasambhava, who propagated Lamaism, traversed most of the places situated between lower Assam and Tibet.²¹² Hayagriva is regarded as one of the important deities among the Tibetan Buddhism²¹³ and Hajo, the place of worship of *Hayagriva* in Assam, was associated with Buddhist tantricism much earlier than *Kalikapurana*.²¹⁴ With the growing influence of neo-Brahmanical trends, *Kalikapurana* illustrated Hayagriva as the incarnation of Vishnu connecting with pan Indian literature.²¹⁵ However, Hayagriva in Assam retains its Tantric mode of nature.²¹⁶

From very early days, thus the northern Assam got her Lamaism, which continues among the Sherdukpens, Monpas, Membas and Khambas besides the

²¹⁰ Maheswar Neog, *Religion of the North East*, op.cit., p. 36.

²¹¹ L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, op.cit., p. 310.

²¹² Lamaism is based mainly on the rigorous intellectual disciplines of *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara* philosophy and utilizes the symbolic ritual practices of Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism). *The new Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2, 15th edition, 2007, p. 756; L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, op.cit., p. 313.

²¹³ For details, see L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, op.cit., pp. 62, 164, 364 & 529; Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya* op.cit., p. 69.

²¹⁴ Bobby Das, *Hayagriva in Assam, A brief study*, proceedings of North East India History Association, thirty first Session, Tura, 2010, pp. 47-51.

²¹⁵ According to Hindu belief, *Hayagriva* is a deity with the head of horse and an incarnation of Vishnu that had been mentioning from the time of *Mahabharata* onwards. Gradually, the story variously refers in Puranas viz. *Matsya Purana*, *Skanda*, *Markandeya*. For details, see Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p. 68; J.C. Ghosh, 'Hayagriva worship in Assam', *JAR.S.*, vol. II, no. 4, 1935, pp. 79-80.

²¹⁶ Tantric rituals influenced the mode of worship Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, p. 332; J.C. Ghosh, 'Hayagriva worship In Assam', op.cit., p. 48 ; for details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, op.cit., pp. 38-40; Bobby Das, *Hayagriva in Assam a brief Stuty*, op.cit., pp. 47-51; Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, op.cit., pp. 550-551.

allied Bhutiyas who live along the border. Different groups bearing Buddhism namely Singphos, Khamtis, Phakiyal or Tai-Phake the Naras, the Turungs and the Aitonias migrated in succeeding periods.²¹⁷ The Monpas and Sherdukpens communities, who were followers of Buddhism, regard Hajo as their pilgrimage site along with Shingri (Dhekiajuli of Assam).²¹⁸ It has accepted that from early days, northern Assam accepted the Tibetan form of Buddhism or Lamaism.²¹⁹ Trade contact facilitated movements of religious groups and even engaged in trade.²²⁰ The people in the Assam plain and the Hills lying along with northern border have been maintaining steady trade contact with Tibet. The Tibetan traders entered the lower lands through different routes which opened on the *duwars*, or doors like Bijni and Chapaguri in the present Kamrup district and Burigoma in the Darrang district.²²¹ The Bhutias used to come by the valley of the Manas River via Tasgong and Dewangiri to Hajo where a fair was usually held.²²² Hajo, which is famous for the Hayagriva Madhava cult²²³ was a great medieval center of trade in horse.²²⁴

²¹⁷ In the North-East India, the Monpa, Sherdukpen and Memba traditions assert that Padmasambhava visited their territories in the eight century C.E., and preached Buddhism among them. On the other the Khamtis and Singphos inhabiting the Lohit and parts of Tirap district, followed Theravada, Buddhism. For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, pp. 133- 136.

Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guahati, 2008, pp. 89-103.

²¹⁸ 'A temple complex called Viswakarma thail near the Shingri hills at Dhekiajuli in the district of Darrang in Assam is visited by the Sherdukpens and Monpas of Darrang area. The name of this complex arose from a legend according to which it was built by the god named Visvakarma'. For details, see Niranjana Sarkar, *Buddhism Among the Monpas and Sherdukpens*, Director of Research, Itanagar, 1980, reprint 2006, pp. 91-94.

²¹⁹ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,' *op.cit.*, p. 212.

²²⁰ For details, see A.K. Thakur, "Polity of Pre-Colonial Arunachal Pradesh: Interactions in Trade, Culture, State and Buddhism" in S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.), *Buddhism in North-East India*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 241-63 ; *idem.*, "Colonial and Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: The Monpas in Perspective", *Journal of Historical Research*, vol. XII, 2002, Department of History, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam, pp. 51-59; *idem.*, "Pattern of Pre-Colonial Trade and Polity Formations in Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of their Relationship" in the *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, (hereafter *PNEIHA*), Imphal Session, 2000 pp. 299-318.

²²¹ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

²²² S. Gupta, British Relations with Bhutan, p. 20 as cited H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. III, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

²²³ The development of the Horse necked Hayagriva or Tam Din associated with Tibetan form of Tantric Buddhism or Lamaism. L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 64, 164, 364 & 529.

²²⁴ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India* Monarhar, New Delhi, 1995, p. 52.

Buddhism or Tantric form of Buddhism in Assam was not only associated with Tibet. The Buddhist images found in Assam are almost similar in nature, which are generally available in Nepal, Tibet or Bengal. During the early medieval period, Tantric Buddhist scholars or Sahajiya Siddha holding contact between Kamarupa, Bengal, Orissa, Mithila, Tibet and Nepal, developed a cultural zone. The non-institutionalized Sahajiya Siddha who flourished around the tenth century, preached their ideology through their songs that is known as *Carya Padas*.²²⁵ Sahajiya Siddha such as Saraha, Luipa, Padmavajra, Anangavajra and Indrabhuti publicly preached their doctrines and encouraged the people to follow their tenets, doctrine and practices and also popularized the Sahajayana Tantricism.²²⁶ They had developed a common bond of religious affinity between Orissa, Bengal and Assam.²²⁷ The Sahajiya had established strong holds in the areas of Assam such as Rangjuli, Bijoyapura (Barnagar), Kondoli, Dovaka and Bajulia.²²⁸ Nirode Boruah says

‘Religious beliefs never confine it within a particular geographic space with fixed boundaries. ‘The geographic provenance of the archaeological remains belonging to early Assam and bearing the traits of various pantheons such as Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina faiths, show that in some particular geographic spaces the aforesaid religious beliefs have shown their prominence and left their distinguishable marks.’²²⁹

²²⁵ Sahajiya Siddhas who flourished mainly from 10th to 12th centuries composed *Caryapadas* centering round the esoteric doctrines and esoteric practices of Sahajayana form of Mahayana Buddhism. Maheswar Neog, ‘Major language and literatures of modern India; Assamese,’ *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. v, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta, second edition, 1978, p. 420; P.C. Bagchi, ‘The Cult of Buddhist Siddhacarya,’ *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, p. 276.

²²⁶ D.P. Chottopadhaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, p. 153; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 12; R.S Sharma, ‘Material Milieu of Tantricism’, *op.cit.*, p. 185

²²⁷ The period was marked by the socio-political contact of Assam with other parts of India. In the middle of the 8th century C.E. i.e., in the period of Harshavarma deva (725-750 C.E.) Kamarupa extended its boundaries that touched parts of Bengal and Orissa and concluded relationship with Nepal. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, pp. 233 & 317.

²²⁸ Rajmohan Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

²²⁹ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

There are number of images largely affiliated to Mahayana and Vajrayana found in different parts of Assam.²³⁰ They suggest that Buddhism especially Mahayana and Vajrayana not only developed in the nuclear area of the capital of royal kingdom, but spread to different areas of the region. Scholar believes that many Hindu temples erected on the old Buddhist sites and became undistinguishable with the rise of Tantricism.²³¹

Images affiliated to Buddhism are discovered in greater Gauhati mostly in the areas such as Kamakhya, Odalbakra (Narakasur hill, Guwahati) etc. Traces of Buddhism were also found in Da- Parbatya (Sonitpur), Golaghat, Sri Suryapahar, Pancharatna, Gurmou , Abhayapuri, Pratagarh tea estate (Sonitpur) and other places. Among the Buddhist remains found in different parts of the region are caves, stupas, and sculptural representation along with different symbols. The Buddha figures fall broadly into three classes, such as *sthanaka* (standing), *asana* (seated) and *Sayana* (lying). Further, these figures exhibit various hand poses or *mudras*, the commonest among them being *Abhaya*(protection), *Varada* (bestowing gift), *Dhyana*(meditation), *Bhumisparsa*(earth-touching) and *Vyakhyana* (preaching).²³² The images found in the region affiliated to Buddhism, during the period under review, exhibit some of these postures such as *Abhaya*(protection), *Varada* (bestowing gift), *Dhyana*(meditation and *Bhumisparsa*(earth-touching). Large number of images affiliated to Buddhism found in Guwahati and surrounding areas, were *Padmapani*, *Mahapratishara*, *Tara*, *Jatamukuta Lokeswara*, and *Chunda*.

The Buddhist remains of early centuries of the Christian era suggest that the western part of Assam (the present Goalpara) was dominated by Buddhist faith. As mentioned in previous discussion, there are earliest specimens of Buddhist remains assigned to 100 or 100 B.C. are found in western part of Assam i.e.in Goalpara and present Meghalaya. The structural feature consisting of Anda & Harmika are distinct on the stupas in Suryapahar. The stupas, are archaic in shape with three gradually receding rings round the base. On the top of the dome there are the remnants of a

²³⁰ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations, op.cit.* p. 332.

²³¹ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations, op.cit.*, p. 327; after examining some of the remains of Assam E.T. Dalton comes to the conclusion that some new shrines had been built with material belonging to Buddhist shrine E.T Dalton, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, xxiv, pp. 10-12.

²³² *The Way of the Buddha, op.cit.*, p. 215.

square *harmika*. In a number of sites at Goalpara district, there are scattered remains of temples and buildings. The Assam State Museum, Guwahati collected Terracotta Plaque near Surya Pahar. Here, eight miniature figures of Buddha are shown in two-tiers, four each of the upper and lower tiers. All the figures are in *bhumisparsamudra* and stumped on the plaque. These types of terracotta sculptures carrying the Buddha figures were popular during the Pala dynasty.²³³ The Directorate of Archaeology, Assam, conducted an excavation at Paglatek under the supervision of N.D. Choudhary in the month of January 1999. Three trenches were dug at Paglatek, measuring each of them 7 square meters. Scholar believes the ruins as the traces of Buddhist Vihara.²³⁴ During the course of excavation at Paglatek they also explored the village Majipara, Barbhita about one Km west of Paglatek ruins. Some terracotta, depicted dhyanī Buddha, Stupas are also found in Majipara, Barbhita of Goalpara. Terracotta Buddhist stupas that found at Majipara, Barbhita are similar with the Stupas at Suryapahar.²³⁵ Recently, one Buddha image about 40 cm has been discovered at Bhairabeswari temple ruins in the village of Gurmow near Gareswar. Another metallic image also have been found at Siponsillam pahar near Abhayapuri of modern Bongaigaon district.²³⁶ It is believed that the caves of Jogighopa (five caves) that assigned about early centuries of the Common Era, used by the Buddhist monks.²³⁷ The name Jogighopa also suggests the fact as *Jogi* means ascetic and *ghopa* denotes cave.

In Pancaratna Hills (Goalpara), two figures of the deities with *bhumisparsa mudra* (posture generally associated with Buddhism)²³⁸ and lotus or *dharmacakra* of Buddhism have found in Dekdhoa or Pancarata in Goalpara.²³⁹ Some of the relics those are visible at the temple of Yogighopa were contemporary with the specimens of Kamakhya and Pandu between ninth and tenth century C.E.. These remains

²³³ Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 203.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

²³⁸ S. Kakati, *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, April, 1934 as cited in P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 336.

²³⁹ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 406.

speak that these sites have been a center of Buddhism.²⁴⁰ Goalpara and Kamrup districts are known in common parlance even in the present day as *Dhekor* country, and the people are slightly designated as *Dhekeris*. The Buddhist records consider *Dhekor* as the great religious center of the faith.²⁴¹

It has already mentioned that Kamakhya, which some time substituted by Kamarupa, included as one of the four important centers of Tantric Buddhism i.e. Vajrayana.²⁴² Various sculptural images of Buddha and related deities are found at Nilachala premises. In the left side of the old path leading from the Kamakhya temple below there are three stone boulders where three images are engraved. One of them is undoubtedly of Buddha having two hands with *Bhumisparsamudra* (earth-touching motive).²⁴³ Other two images are of same size and same fashion but have four arms. The additional two arms carry mace (*gada*) and lotus (*padma*) two of the four belongings of Vishnu and so looks like Vishnu. An opinion is that these two arms were sculptured in later period.²⁴⁴

A sculptural image of Buddha on *simhasana-mudra* has found in a slab of stone of west side of the slaughter house of Kamakhya.²⁴⁵ Some of the sculptural images depicted in Nilachala represent various events related to life of Buddha, Boddhistva, and *Parinirvana* etc. Among them, the births story of Gautama, the marriage archery contest and his great departure are noteworthy.²⁴⁶ On the northern side of Kamakhya temple, there is an image of elephant. As the white elephants stand for the birth story of Buddha, scholars believe that it symbolically represents the birth story of Gautama Buddha.²⁴⁷ On the western side of the temple, there is a symbol of archery contest that represents the story of the participation of Buddha in

²⁴⁰ H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.* p. 441.

²⁴¹ As cited in Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese culture*, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

²⁴² H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 339; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relation*, *op.cit.*, pp. 330-331.

²⁴³ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century AD*, *op.cit.*, p. 438.,

²⁴⁴ P.J. Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

²⁴⁵ Gangaram Choudhary, *Buddhist Relics in Assam*, Tribune Press, Guwahati, 1961, p. 6.

²⁴⁶ G.R. Choudhary, *Sculptural Representation of the life the Buddha on the Buddhist monuments at Nilacala Hill*, Assam Research Society for Buddhistic Studies, Guwahati, Assam, 1964, pp. 4-14.

²⁴⁷ G.R. Choudhary, *Defilement of Nilachala (Kamakhya) temple Asthikumbha*, Assam Research Society for Buddhistic Studies, Guwahati, Assam, 1969, Guwahati, p. 2; S. Sasanananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 138;

archery competition during his marriage. Like that, on the south of the temple, Gautama Buddha riding on horseback represents the great departure of Buddha from home.²⁴⁸ Besides these, one relic casket similar to that of Sanchi, originally believed as *Asthi Kumbha* (contained the ash of Buddha) is seen. Scholar believes the two octagonal pillars that found in Kamakhya represent eightfold path of Buddhism.²⁴⁹ There are two icons of Hariti (female figure holding a child on her lap) found in the two sides of the western gate of Kamakhya temple. Near that, the images of Buddhist Tara are also present. These sculptures, along with relic casket, show that Nilachala was a great center of Buddhism at least from the time of Mahayana.²⁵⁰ The remains, centering round Kamakhya belong to the different periods of history, beginning with the 7th -8th century and the original shrines, perhaps dedicated to Surya and Buddhists deities are destroyed.²⁵¹

Some deities affiliates to the tantric form of Buddhism such as Chamunada, Saraswati, Balabhadra and Yogini also sculptured in the various temple sites at Kamakhya premise. Near the Kamakhya premise i.e. greater Guwahati area, numbers of images affiliated to Buddhism had been discovered. The deity Chamunda is portrayed in Buddhist literature as she 'rides on a corpse and is of red colour. She is four armed. With the first pair of hands she holds the Katri in the right and the Kapala in the left. In the second she exhibits the Anjali'.²⁵² Similar with that, there are two images of Camunda found in Kamakhya belonged to the ninth and tenth century.²⁵³ One of the images seated on a corpse, over a double petalled lotus. She has an emaciated a skeleton like body with three sunken eyes and wear garlands of human skulls. She has four hands the upper right holds a *katri*, lower right a *kapala*.²⁵⁴ Another is also almost similar in fashion but the image in some measure mutilated and trisula in lower hand. Another mutilated image of Chamunda was

²⁴⁸ S. Sasanananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 140-141.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141; B. Tripathy & S. Dutta (eds.), *Buddhism in North- East India*, Indus Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 58-59.

²⁵⁰ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century A.D*, *op.cit.*, p. 438;

²⁵¹ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, pp. 330-331.

²⁵² B. Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 365.

²⁵³ H.K Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 374.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

found in Na-bhanga of Nogwong district.²⁵⁵ I have found during my field studies for this monograph two Chamuna statues rejected by orthodox priests now rest in the courtyard of Kedareswara temple at Kamakhya premise, under the open sky.

Near the of Kamakhya premise i.e. greater Guwahati area, numbers of images affiliated to Buddhism had discovered. Among them, two miniature images (Portable nature) are found in the area; one in stone-slab and another in Terracotta. The image of Buddha in stone slab exhibits the *Abhaya mudra* and the dress and style of the image was typically Tibetan.²⁵⁶ The image of Buddha in terracotta exhibits the earth touching posture (*Bhumisparsa mudra*) of Mahayana Buddhism that assigned to eleventh century. Similar votive tablets are found in large numbers in Bengal and Bihar. These are of portable nature. Scholar believes that these are probably imported from that region.²⁵⁷ Another image carved in a large and heavy stone- slab, found at Guwahati represented an image of *Mahapratishara*, a Buddhist Goddess of Tantricism.²⁵⁸ This image is not portable, thus it seems the local artisans were engaged to make this image.²⁵⁹

Some of the images found at Narakasur hill near Guwahati, are now displayed in the State Museum. Among them there are three statues of Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteswara*, two statues of Tara and one statue of Chunda. The metallic images of Narakasur Hill are of miniature forms. It is believed they are produced by local manufacturer.²⁶⁰

Among these two Buddhisatva images, one is standing and another is sitting. First one stands on lotus pedestal having two hands, right hand of *Varadamudra* where left hand is missing. Scholar believes that originally it held a lotus by the stalk.²⁶¹ The seated image of four handed Avalokiteswara was seated in *lalitasanamudra* on a lotus, by two standing attendant of divinities, each having a halo behind the head. Another standing Bodhisattva statue is shown in *tribhanga*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

²⁵⁶ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-100.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

²⁵⁸ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

²⁵⁹ H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 417.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 417; Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 204.

²⁶¹ Generally, the emblems of Avalokiteswara are Varadamudra and lotus. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 417.

attitude. Both left foot and left hand are broken. R.D. Choudhary identifies the image as Loknatha.²⁶² The period of these statues are assigned to 10th century C.E.²⁶³

The two images of Tara are also found at Narakasur hill near Guwahati, one is standing and another is sitting. The standing image of two hands shows *varadamudra* and holding a lotus or lily in right and left hand respectively. The seated image also shows similar hand posture who sits on *lalitasamudra* on a lotus. In this group of images, the standing figure of Tara may belong to the 9th -10th century and the seated Tara appears to be little later and it to be assigned to the eleventh century'.²⁶⁴

Another eight handed image affiliated to Buddhism found in Narakasur ruins is recognised as Chuna.²⁶⁵ Chunda, the popular image of Tantric Buddhism, had been showing great vitality in Bengal and Bihar in these days.²⁶⁶ However, the statue of Chunda found in the region is the product of local manufacturer.²⁶⁷

There is an image at the Sukreswar temple near Panbazar area of Guwahati which is popularly known as Buddha- Janardana. It is a four –armed image of seated deity where two hands are in *bhumisparsa* mudra. Of the two upper hands hold *gada* and *padma*(belonging to Vishnu). The image is of amalgam between Buddha and Vishnu (*Janardan*). The period of the statue assigned to 10th century C.E.²⁶⁸

²⁶² As cited in Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.* p. 204.

²⁶³ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 465.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

²⁶⁵ Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.* p. 203; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 420.

²⁶⁶ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, pp. 99-100; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 417 -421.

²⁶⁷ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 417.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 344-345; Gajendra Adhikary, *A History of the Temples of Kamrup And Their Management*, Chandra Prakash, 2001, p. 23.

It is believed that the Ambari (Guwahati) finds (7th-13th century), showing both phallic emblems and icons of most of the Hindu deities, attached to a Tantric Buddhist establishment.²⁶⁹ The Stone Inscription of Samudrapala found at Ambari, assigned to 1154(i.e. 1232C.E) mentions *Savasika satra* (residential house of the saints) and indicates the possibility of a monastery of the Buddhist *Bhiksus* (monk) practicing the esoteric Sadhanas of a tantric religion.²⁷⁰

In the north of Guwahati, in the Brahmaputra, the rocky isle Umananda is situated. Buddhist pilgrims, especially from the Himalaya region, come in hordes in the winter season to pay their homage to this site. It is suggested that the brick built eight –sided hemisphere dome of the shrine was of Buddhist architecture, expressive of eight noble path of nirvana.²⁷¹ Observing the varieties of icons, some in erotic postures in the temple ruins at Pingalewsar, scholar views that there existed a Tantric- Buddhist temple. Like the icons and sculpture found in Madana Kamdeva, located about 45 K.M north of Guwahati these icon show that they have Tantric-Buddhist affiliation.²⁷² Mayong is situated in Morigaon, about 40 KM from Guwahati and once considered the land of black magic in the country. Legends inform that many Tibetan monks came there and performed Tantric practices.

The installed deity is at Hajo whom the followers of Hindu regard as Hayagriva –Madhava but the Buddhist Lamas from Tibet and Bhutan use to visit this temple and pay their obeisance to the deity, whom they called Mahamuni. The statue always covered by a thick veil of cloths and nobody is allowed by the priests to see the image properly. Col Dalton believes that the original statue was mutilated

²⁶⁹ “*Adityasama Srisamudrapalarajye PrabalaSabasikasatra
Sagunkriya Sanyasin bule Danapunye Saja Yogihati
Sak ish yanachakra murha vanati*”

P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations op.cit.*, p. 327.

²⁷⁰ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century AD, op cit.*, p. 437f; Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamarupasasanavali*, Publication Board, Assam, 1981, p. 159

²⁷¹ Gangaram Choudhary, *Sapta Boddhisattvas and their sculptural Representations in Assam*, Assam Research Society for Buddhistic Studies, Guwahati, p. 8.

²⁷² Directorate of Archeology, Assam, unearthed score of sculpture of superb workmanship. There are various images of Surya, Ganesha, Gajalakhmi, Devi, Uma-Maheswari along with some erotic sculpture of 11th -12th centuries are unearthed. Some sculptures found appear queer and terrible in their expression. Thus, P.C. Choudhary believes that the place was an important center of tantric mode of worship. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relation, op.cit.*, p. 331; *idem.*, *The History of Civilization of the People Assam to the Twelve Century A.D op.cit.*, p. 421.

by the votaries of Hinduism and so it covered with cloth and flowers.²⁷³ It is believed that present temple of Haygriva was built with old materials and upon an old Buddhist site.²⁷⁴

There is a shrine at Chaygaon near Guwahati, locally known as Medh which is believed as another vestige of Buddhism. There is a circular slab and encircles it by a circular passage with a rectangular (projection on one side) exit. In the center of the circular shrine a stone image of Surya of about 12th century was placed. It is believed that this shrine at Chaygaon belongs to Buddhist where there was a votive chaitya in the center which has removed for the altar of Surya.²⁷⁵

Popular legend and folk songs known as Uja-Pali, current in the region, speak of a temple built by Chand Sadagar at Champak Nagar, which is identified with Chaygaon.²⁷⁶ The story relates to Manasa cult which has distant relation with later form of Buddhism. Recently some manuscripts, written in Tibetan language are found in the Chaygaon area. The preliminary study shows that these are related to tantric Buddhist faith.²⁷⁷

Hariti occupies a prominent place in tantric Buddhist text²⁷⁸ and this image is found in different places of Assam. Among various images found, two statues identified as Hariti are collected from Deopani (Karbi Anglong).²⁷⁹ A statue of Tara image also collected from Hahara (Sonapur) is identified by R.D. Choudhary as a Buddhist deity i.e. Hariti.²⁸⁰

Evidence suggests that Buddhist Tantricism also spread to Sadiya region. It is supposed that, in early period, there was the existence of civilized settlements in that part of area. Modern explorers have discovered the ruins of two forts between

²⁷³ E.T. Dalton, *Journal of Asiatic society of Bengal*, lxi, p. 37 as referred L. Austine Waddell, *Lamaism, op.cit.*, p. 309 -311.

²⁷⁴ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D.*, p. 438.

²⁷⁵ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 430.

²⁷⁶ For details, see K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa, op.cit.*, p. 122.

²⁷⁷ There are 150 folios collected by Jiten Das from the house of Kalikanta Sarma of Chaygaon and deposited at Department of History and Antiquarian Study, Guwahati. Accession no. 2784. In that folios there are description of the Buddhist Tantric practices written in Tibetan scripts.

²⁷⁸ Maheswar Neog, *Religion of the North-East, op.cit.*, p. 59.

²⁷⁹ 'Archaeological Notes: Report of the Archaeological Exploration and Excavation in Dhansiri Sub-division of Golaghat District of Assam', *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol. xxxiii, no. 2, 1994, printed 1997, p. 89.

²⁸⁰ Nishipad Dev Choudhary 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 204.

the gorges of the Dikrang and the Dibong, about 24 miles from Sadiya.²⁸¹ It is found mentioned in *Yoginitantra* that there was one *Kalva Pitha* in the Northeastern region where moral and secular laws are framed by the tribesmen and followed by themselves.²⁸²

In Buddhist *Manjsrimulakalpa*, there is the mention of kings bearing the title of Kala living in the valley (kuksi) of the Himalayas.

Ambhuge kukshiniranta nripakhyanta anantaka

Kamarupakalakhya hi Himadre kuksimasrita.....^{283.}

Kalikapurana attached the region with the story of Sati's dead body. The goddess is said to have lived there in the form of *Dikkarvasini* and manifested herself as Ugratara/ Tiksnakanta (Tara, Ekjata), and Srimangala Candika/ Lalitakanta.²⁸⁴ The deity Tara, Ugratara and Ekjata is of Buddhist origin and Ugratara of Dikkarvasini is Brahmanic Sakta adoption of Mahayana Buddhist cult Tara.²⁸⁵ In the *Kalikapurana* (80.43-4) the expression *vajrapushpa* is given as a mantra for the adoration of Tiksnakanta and this very expression occurs in the sacred formula *Om Oddiyanavajrapushpe Svaha* etc. in the Buddhist *Sadhanamala*.²⁸⁶ Thus, it seems that the region was once associated with Buddhist tantric faith. In North Lakhimpur, there is a sacred place at Gharamara known as NilaThan. It may be supposed that the cult Nila Tara which has a connection with Buddhist Tara deity, was prevalent there.²⁸⁷ It is also presumed by scholar that copper temple at Sadiya had its tantric Buddhist affiliation.²⁸⁸ Scholar believes that

²⁸¹ B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 59.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁸³ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, vol. III, op.cit., p. 648.

²⁸⁴ Ugratara is generally identified with Tikshnakanta and Ekjata. B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 63.

²⁸⁵ Maheswar Neog, *Religion of the North- East*, op.cit., pp. 123-128.

For details, see H K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 321.

²⁸⁷ Taratantra is also known as Cinacaratatantra that speaks about the worship of Nilatara. Biswanarayan Sastri, 'Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, xxxii, no. 2, 1992, p. 4; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. 1, op.cit., p. 321.

²⁸⁸ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relation*, op.cit., p. 334; H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 321.

many Hindu temples erected on old Buddhist sites and became undistinguishable with the rise of Tantricism.²⁸⁹

There are some syncretic images (syncretism between Buddha and Vishnu) also found in the region. One of the examples of the synthesis form of Buddhism and Vaisnavism is the statue found at Numaligarh. The image, which is known as Vishnu, seated in 'Rajlila mudra' having four hands. His upper two hands carried 'Sankha' and 'Gada' (two of the four belongings of Vishnu, according to Hindu beliefs) while his lower two hands said to be in 'upadesa mudra' and carries a rosary which is unusual for representation of god Vishnu. It is believed by the scholars that it was the combination of Vishnu and Avalokiteswara in one form.²⁹⁰ Thus, the remains and traces of Buddhism that scattered in different parts of the region are indicative of the spread and development of Buddhism in Assam.

From the above discussion it emerges that Buddhism has its beginning in Assam in post-Asokan period. In the first few centuries of the Common Era,²⁹¹ a group of the follower of Buddhism entered Assam using the trade routes from the western boundary of Assam. Probably they seceded from the original Sangha and performed their practices by constructing stupas in Goalpara area. They came to the touch with its inhabitant before the development of Brahmanical religious system in Assam.²⁹² Buddhism developed as per the need for survival and accordingly it appropriated with the prevailing belief and faith. Since Assam was dominated by the faith of non-Aryan and aboriginal such as fetishism, magic worship etc. Thus, it was a fertile ground for the development of tantric traits. At that period, Vajrayana or

²⁸⁹ E.T. Dalton is of the opinion that new shrines had been built with material belonging to Buddhist shrine. E.T. Dalton, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, xxiv, pp. 10-12; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 327.

²⁹⁰ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, op.cit., p. 395.

²⁹¹ There was no any institutional status of Mahayana till 5th century C.E. as in inscriptions Mahayana by name occur only 6th century. Even no monks received any donations as Mahayanists as that had left no mark in inscriptions until 5th century CE. Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, op.cit., p. 22.

²⁹² In the words of N.D. Choudhary, 'No sculptures of Brahmanical religion (Saivism Vaisnavism and Saktism) have been found in Assam earlier than 5th-6th century AD, which can also be taken as an indirect proof that a large section of people of Assam accepted Buddhism and continued it till 4th-5th A.D'. Thus, Buddhism was developed much earlier than the development of Brahmanical religion in the region. Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,' op.cit., p. 215.

Buddhist esoterism was taking its initial shape in India and existed entirely outside of the established Buddhist monastic framework.

The political condition of Assam during the advent of Buddhism cannot be ascertained due to the dearth of sources. After the rule of semi-historical ruler Naraka,²⁹³ Kamarupa came under the rule of Varmana dynasty. The political institutions and mechanism of Varmana provided the infrastructure to develop Brahmanical religion and culture.²⁹⁴ Of course, Varmana rulers maintained its socio-cultural contacts with the other parts of India and abroad where Buddhism made its headway. During this period Buddhists performed their practices secretly.

It was during the seventh century there was cordial environment of Buddhism with the royal association under Bhaskarvarma. Inspired by the royal association of Buddhism, the new movement of Buddhism became visible in Assam after the generations of secret spells.

Kamarupa became an important center of Vajrayana by the seventh century i.e. during the rule of Salastambha, the Mleccha leader of the 7th century and that had been continuing till the early Salastambha rulers.²⁹⁵ It has mentioned earlier in this chapter that Buddhist Tantricism got its wide appeal among the professional caste.²⁹⁶

In the mean time esoteric Buddhism received the patronage of the Pala rulers of Bengal especially from Devapala (C.E. 810-850).²⁹⁷ Buddhist Tantra became well established in different universities in India such as Nalanda, Vikramsila and

²⁹³ Scholars namely P.C. Choudhary and P.J. Deka believe that Naraka was follower of Buddhism. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam –Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 294; P.J. Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp. 23-24.

²⁹⁴ B.N. Puri, *Studies in Early History and Administration in Assam*, Department of Publication, Guwahati, University, 1968, p. 7.

²⁹⁵ The early rulers of Salastambha dynasty might have extended patronage to the Buddhist tantric establishment at Kamakhya as the older temple at Kamakhya which was once a center of Buddhist Tantric dated back to 7th to 8th to eight century. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 330.

²⁹⁶ Lower order of *Varnasrama* associated with the Tantricism D.P.Chattapadhyaya, *Lokayat*, op.cit., pp. 330- 331.

N.B. Evidence suggests that in Assam Buddhist tantricism developed earlier than the association of Tantrics with Hinduism.

²⁹⁷ Editor's preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, op.cit., p. lxii; Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 4-5. Manikuntala Halder (De), *Baudha Dharmer Itihas*, op.cit., pp. 80-87; *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 313.

Jagaddala.²⁹⁸ In the eight century C.E., with the efforts of famous scholar on Tantra Santaraksita and Padmasambhava Lamaism (Buddhism of its modifying old practices) was established in Tibet.²⁹⁹ It is to mention here that after the eight century, there remained no necessity for secrecy any longer as the principles of Vajrayana were well established and widely spread through the teachings and mystic songs of the Buddhist Siddhas. It has been mentioned that like Kamakhya Srihatta (Shylhet) is also mentioned as important Vajrayana center in *Hevajratantra*. The Vajrayana Buddhism flourished in Vanga and Samtata region was that includes the present areas such as Chittagaon, Tipperah, Mymensing, Dacca, Faridpur and Backerganj.³⁰⁰ Gradually, tantric form of Buddhism formed a wide cultural zone in this part of the World including Assam, Bengal, Nepal, Tibet and China.³⁰¹

The rulers of Kamarupa particularly after the early Salastambha, who followed the Hindu ideology also extended patronage to Tantricism.³⁰² In the Guwahati Copper Plate grant, king Indrapala is mentioned as the master of Tantras besides other branches of study.³⁰³ Accordingly, the tantric practices penetrated into the political elites of Assam and major sectarian divisions of new Brahmanical trends such as Satkism, Savisim and Vaisnavism.

Consequent upon the political patronage to Hinduism, the Brahmins could control the major cultic centers that had been associated so far with non-Aryans and

²⁹⁸ For details, see Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1962, p. 349; Benaytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheons,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 530.

²⁹⁹ Lamaism is based mainly on the rigorous intellectual disciplines of Madhyamika and Yogacara philosophy utilizes the symbolic ritual practices of Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism). *The new Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2, 15th edition, 2007 p. 756; For details, see P. V. Bapat, 'School and sects of Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 501; L. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, p. 313;

³⁰⁰ Benaytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

³⁰¹ The esoteric Buddhism transmitted to Tibet, Nepal, China and Nepal from India. Editor's preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. lxii,

³⁰² The Tantric *Anji* sign first time appeared in the Tejpur Copper plate grant of Vanamala Varman 12 (835 C.E.-855 C.E.). That was followed by inscriptions of successive periods such as Parbatiya Copper Plate grant of Vanamaladeva, Uttarbill Copper Plate of Balbarman III. For details, see Dimmeswar Sarma (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 148-149.

³⁰³ N.B. King Indrapala was proficient in Tantra along with other branches of study. M. M. Sharma, *Insription of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

the Buddhists.³⁰⁴ The places dominated by Buddhist Tantricism such as Nilachala, Hajo and Surya Pahar³⁰⁵ either became a place of syncretism or became a place of Hindu Tirtha. The Brahmanical sculptures which found in the stupa premises of Surya Pahar are the product of the ninth century.³⁰⁶ The tribal cultic centers at Nilachala³⁰⁷ where Buddhists performed their esoteric practices developed as an abode of Brahmanical Mother Goddess Kamakhya. In the same time, literate group namely Brahmanas developed Puranic mythology that served as instruments for the popularity of neo-Brahmanical religion.³⁰⁸ In course of time, Hinduism and Buddhism came closer to each other with the great synthesizing force of Tantricism that developed within both the religious system and accordingly the practices became almost indistinguishable between the two. Thus, scholar is of the opinion the rise of neo-Vaisnavism is not the prime factor for the decline of Buddhism in early Assam but it was the influence of Buddhist Tantricism.³⁰⁹

Since Kamarupa emerged from tribal society at the period of early introduction of Buddhism, so the people of Kamarupa inclined towards Buddhism, but the ritualistic aspects of Puranic form of Hinduism became more popular than Buddhism. In course of time, Buddhism had to lose its popularity and coalesced with various tenets of Hinduism.

³⁰⁴ After penetrating Brahmanical religion in to tribal areas, tantricism within Hinduism was developed as the result of a fusion between brahmanical religion and tribal or folk religions. R. N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973.

³⁰⁵ The Brahmanical sculptures which found in the stupa premises of Surya Pahar are the product of the ninth century. For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, pp. 463-464.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 463-464.

³⁰⁷ In early period, the Austric and other earliest inhabitant of Assam worshipped the fissured stone that personified as Devi at Nilachala. B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

³⁰⁸ The rise of Mahayanism and Tantricism widened its popular appeal. The growing popularity of Tantricism among tribals and outcastes seem to have further deepened such a threat perception on the part of the Brahmins. It was, therefore, the fear of losing ground to the rival systems, literate group namely Brahmanas develop Puranic mythology. Vishnu was appropriated with Hayagriva, the tantric Buddhist deity that was an astute attempt to subvert the existence of Buddhism as an independent creed. Accordingly, Brahmanical recognition had given to tribal deities that became popular among the Buddhists.

³⁰⁹ Lila Gogoi, *Asamar Sanskriti*, Banalata, Guwahati, 5th edn, 1995, p.114.

It has generally presumed that esoteric Buddhism became well established in India particularly in the north-western area, and in Bengal ³¹⁰ and developed mostly under the patronage of Pala rulers. However, prior to the Pala rule in Bengal, Kamarupa became an important center of Vajrayana in eastern India.³¹¹ Buddhist tantricism is a pan-Asiatic movement and in India, it had dominated mostly before the 13th century. The Buddhist tantric practices had continued till the rise of neo-Vaisnavism,³¹² when in Bengal and other parts of India Buddhism apparently disappeared by the 13th century.³¹³

Thus on the basis of above discussion we can say that Kamarupa is one of the most ancient places in the world where growth and development of Buddhist Tantricism took place and it served as a last shelter of other forms of Buddhism in India too.

³¹⁰ Editor's preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. Lxi..

³¹¹ *Hevajra Tantra* was composed shortly before 693 C.E., mentions the four important Vajrayana *Peethas* (sacred places) are *Jalandhara, Oddiyana, Purnagiri and Kamarupa*; D.C. Sircar, 'Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, p. 12; G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra, With the Commentrary Yogaratnamala*, *op.cit.*, pp. 76-77.

³¹² K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

³¹³ In the words of K.L. Barua 'In Bengal and Bihar Muslim conquerors, shocked by the debased practices of the Sahajiya Panthis, killed a good number of Kapalikas and burnt their books found in Odantapuri. Many of them escaped to Nepal and Tibet. In Kamarupa they continued to practice their rites undisturbed till the rise of Sankardeva in the fifteenth century who rose public opinion in Assam against Tantrikism to such an extent that the followers of the cult were compelled to abandon most of their revolting rites previously practiced openly'. As cited in, K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

Chapter 3

Forms of Buddhism in Assam

This chapter deals with the nature of transformation of Buddhism after its introduction in Assam. It focuses upon the gradual development of the nature of the ritualistic aspects that reveal from the early stupa worship to the synthesis of esoteric Buddhism with new-Brahmanical religion.

About hundred years after the death of Buddha, the disputes arose over the observance and interpretation of the monastic discipline¹ and many schools of thought developed within Buddhism.² The first schism of Buddhism took place in the second council that was held at Vaisali. In this council, large numbers of monks from eastern region (vriji), advocated for the relaxation of the rigid and strict rules of the Order.³ The orthodox monks from Pava, Kausambi, and Avanti opposed this and accordingly the Council disapproved it. The Vrijian monks being dissatisfied with the verdict of the Council seceded from original council, held a separate meeting, and thus gave rise to the *Mahasanghika*.⁴ *Mahasanghika* School adopted liberal attitude towards certain doctrinal issues and attempted to improve the conservative attitude exhibited by the orthodox group of monks that known as

¹For details, see P.V. Bapat, 'School and sects of Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1958, vol. I, pp. 456-457; Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, edition, 1993, p. 2.

² Romila Thapar is of the opinion that the disputation of the philosophical and analytical views at ideological level is associates with the changing political atmosphere. The 16 small states of India in the 6th century B.C.E were reduced into four within 150 years. Over the next two centuries (roughly 550-350 B.C.E.), these were consolidated into one. Gradually, Magadha became a powerful kingdom under Haryanka-Sisunaga dynasty that conquered Avanti. With the breakup of the lineage society, the Sangha sought new alignments. Some older ties of kingship and political associations persisted in the sects of the Sangha, which took on the character of local faction. The monks from the Vajjiputakas who were responsible for initial schism and for the development of Mahasanghikas had been associated with the Vrijji gana-Sangha, the system was prevalent in Rajgriha, and Sravasti. For details, see Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 148-150; Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 79-81.

³ The Vrijian monks sought to slacken up the very strict rules in monastery in matter of rules and regulation including the food practices. The main problem at the council of Vaisali was whether the monks were to be permitted to accept monetary donation or alms. The monks of the Vaisali who supported the acceptance of donations of money were defeated and broke away. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

⁴ For details, see *The Way of the Buddha*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcastings, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1985, p. 308.

Sthaviravadin or Theravadins.⁵ Thus, the early order of Buddhism broadly divided into two schools viz. *Mahasanghika* and *Sthavirvada* (Theravada). The branch of Buddhism that remained the monastic order is known as '*Nikaya Buddhism*.'⁶ With the passage of time, the split among the Buddhist order led to the emergence of various sects and sub-sects.

Asoka sent missionaries to propagate the Theravada or Sarvastivada doctrine of Buddhism.⁷ It was during the first and second centuries, under the patronage of Kaniska, the Fourth Great Council was held in Kashmir. At that Council, Buddhism was distinctly divided into two broad divisions that are known as Mahayana (great vehicle) and Hinayana (the lesser vehicle).⁸ By the time of the Guptas, the great vehicle or Mahayana became popular and predominated in many parts of India.⁹ Mahayana developed and concerned with common people while Hinayana Buddhism was a monastic form of Buddhism.¹⁰

In the second chapter of this dissertation, we have mentioned that the form of Buddhism that dominated in early Assam was tantric form of Buddhism, which has a close connection with Mahayana form of Buddhism. The evolution of the Tantric

⁵ P.V. Bapat, 'Schools and Sects of Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 458; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1958, p. 13.

⁶ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 2 & 105-106.

⁷ It was Sarvastivada doctrine or Theravada that associated with the Mauryan state. For details, see Romila Thapar, *From Lineage*, *op.cit.*, p. 148; *The Way of the Buddha*, *op.cit.*, p. 308.

⁸ Mahayanism is neither antagonistic to Hinayanism and nor rejects it completely, rather it accepts the teachings of the Hinayana in full and adds them its new ideas and principles. Charles Eliot opines that Mahayana is 'less monastic than the older Buddhism, and more emotional ; warmer in charity, more personal in devotion , more ornate in art, literature and ritual, more disposed to evolution and development, whereas the Hinayana was conservative and rigid'. As cited in Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. II Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p.3. For other details, see S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *History of Indian Buddhism*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerat, 1987, pp. 211-212; A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, third edition, 1967, p. 264.

⁹ During the time of Fa-hien's visit both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism existed side by side in many parts of India. The Chinese pilgrim visited several places of India. He saw scholars, monasteries and other establishments of these two forms of Buddhism at Mathura, Pataliputra, Udyana, Punjab, Sravasti and Sarnath. Kanai Lal Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with special reference to India and Ceylon*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1982, p. 44.

¹⁰ The theistic order of Buddhism i.e. Mahayana with the element of *Bhakti* (devotion) became popular in many parts of India, for it fitted the mood of the time and the need. A. L. Bahsam, *The Wonder That Was India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 264-265.

form of Buddhism derived from the Mahayana school of philosophy and accordingly Buddhist tantra belongs to Mahayana tradition.¹¹ Thus, before going to discuss the sectarian divisions of Buddhism, it is necessary to have a discussion on origin and development of Mahayana Buddhism.

The scholars regarding the nature and development of the Mahayana form of Buddhism forward different opinions. Scholar has maintained the view that Mahayana Buddhism developed out of *Mahasanghika*.¹² In the first few centuries of the Common Era Mahayana had not developed into fully independent School of thought to institution. At that period, it represented a specific doctrinal predilection and existed as a movement within the established Buddhist sect or outside the Buddhist institutions (among the common people or forest monks).¹³ After seceding from mainstream Buddhist, the Mahayana was a small and isolated group, not well established both institutionally and financially. This group used different strategies to adapt with the situation demands and responded to the different political and social structure.¹⁴ It was developed in accordance with the local features of the respective places and became more elastic and flexible according to the environments. Accordingly, the regional variation even within Mahayana form of Buddhism developed.¹⁵

¹¹ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, Conept Publishing, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 1- 4.

¹² As cited in Akira Hirakawa, '*A History of Indian Buddhism*', *op.cit.*, p. 260; Kanai Lal Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with Special Reference to India and Ceylon*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1982, p. 42.

¹³ For details, see Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, pp. 17-22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 -22.

¹⁵ For details, *ibid.*, p. 18; Hajime Nakamura *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1987, pp. 220-221.

In the initial stage of the development, the propounders of Mahayana seem to have been homeless ascetics who did not belong to any orthodox Sangha, and these groups constructed stupas as the bases for their activities.¹⁶ However, around fifth century C.E, it began to occupy privileged positions in selected monasteries.¹⁷ Thus, there are two-stages of developments of Indian Mahayana. In the first stage, the Mahayana arose as a forest movement that practiced meditation, and worship stupas. In the second stage, which occurred some centuries later, Mahayana developed its monastic side. By the seventh century, Mahayana monasticism was well established, particularly in the northwest India.¹⁸

The schism within Buddhism occurred as a rift over the interpretation of Buddhist law, not Buddhist doctrine. In course of time, there occurred wide variety of new interpretations of Buddhist philosophy. The Hinayana is concerned with the exoteric truth while the Mahayana concerned with the esoteric truth.¹⁹ However, Mahayanists advocated the doctrine of two-fold truth in the teachings of Buddha; the outer exoteric truth meant for ordinary people and esoteric truth meant for highly evolved one.²⁰ Mahayana may be interpreted as a 'school' or a philosophical movement (i.e. a body of doctrine) that represented by two schools of thought viz. a)

¹⁶ Akira Hirakawa believes that Mahayana meditation originated from worship of stupas. He is also of the opinion that worshipping of Stupas helps to accumulate property so it contributed for the development of Mahayana Buddhism. He suggests that Mahayana developed and concerned with lay people while Hinayana Buddhism was a monastic form of Buddhism. Buddhist laymen who were not included in the Buddhist Sangha during the life time of Buddha, after the death of Buddha, they constructed stupas (burial mounds) with the remains of Buddha. People, probably not members of a monastic order or pilgrims, offered gold, silver, flowers incense, and food. In this way, the establishment of stupas and the accumulation of property of the people around stupa played an important role for the rise of Mahayana doctrine; for details, see Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 270-274; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism, op.cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁷ There was no any institutional status of Mahayana till 5th century C.E. Mahayana by name occurs in inscriptions only 6th century. Thus, Mahayanists were fostered laypeople and forest dwelling monks who are critical to settled monastic life as it detracts from the life of meditation. For details, see Joseph Walser *Nagarjuna in Context, ibid.*, pp. 13-36.

¹⁸ Reginald A. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1994, pp. 412-413.

¹⁹ S. R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism, op.cit.*, pp. 211-212.

²⁰ Esoteric is inner, secret and mystical that taught to a selected few. Exoteric is opposed to esoteric. It is external and fit to communicate with public.

Madhyamika b) Yogacara.²¹ Nagarjuna was the key figure for the development of *Madhyamika* philosophy in first century CE.²² Approximately two centuries after Nagarjuna; Maitryeya Natha initiated *Yogachara* School (Yogic Practice School) which was further developed by Vasubandhu (C.E. 320-400) and Asanga.²³ In the following centuries, number of syncretic schools had developed, mingling *Madhyamaka* and *Yogachara* doctrines. Gradually, the *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara* School influenced each other and contributed to the development of esoteric Buddhism.²⁴ Mahayanist propounded the *trikaya* doctrine²⁵ and the gradual interpretation of the *trikaya* doctrine and ideals of Bodhisattva gave birth to different schools within Mahayana.

Mahayana reflected its meditational practice, ethical idealism and religious devotionalism along with mystic and esoteric practices.²⁶ One of the most significant elements that developed within Mahayana Buddhism is its ritualistic aspect.²⁷ In early Buddhism neither the Buddha and nor any other deity was worshipped in the form of images, only stupas and other symbols of the Buddha were paid respect but

²¹ Bhikshu Santarakshit, 'Buddhism', in A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 7th impression 2002, p. 94; Joseph walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, op.cit., p. 18.

²² Joseph walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, op.cit., p. 1; The Madhyamika or followers of the Mahayana emphasize wisdom and their method is dialectical. 'They reduce mind and matter directly to Sunyata, the truth of which is revealed by exposing the self –contradictory nature of all statements about the Absolute'. As cited in Bhikshu Santarakshit, 'Buddhism,' A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, op.cit., p. 94; Joseph walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, op.cit., pp. 18 & 94.

²³ Maitryeya natha initiated *Yogacra* by 3rd century C.E. The Yogacarins or practitioners of Yoga stress on meditation, and their approach is intuitive. They reduce matter to mind and then mind to *Sunyata*, the truth of which drowns upon the purified consciousness in the depths of meditation as cited Bhikshu Santarakshit, 'Buddhism', A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, op.cit., p. 94.

²⁴ In the eight-century, synthesis of the two were attempted by eminent authors like Santarakshita (ca. 680-740), Kamalasila (C.E.740-790) and Haribhadra whom the Tibetan tradition describes as *yogacara-Madhyamika*. Bhikshu Santarakshit, 'Buddhism', *ibid.*, p. 94; Gayatri Sen Majumdar, "Buddhism in Ancient Bengal", *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, vol. xiii, 1977-78, pp. 246- 247.

²⁵ Mahayanist interpreted Buddha is not a man but an eternal principle, and he has three aspects, namely, '*Dharmakaya*', '*Sambhogakaya*', '*Nirmankaya*'. The body of Buddha is regarded as '*Dharmakaya*' (cosmic body) and then Gautam Buddha identical with nirvana or Sunyata that roughly corresponding to the concept of Braman. The '*Sambhogakaya*' is a subtle body, which the Buddhas use for imparting knowledge to the Bodhisattvas. '*Nirmankaya*' is the body of transformation, i.e. the human form worn by sakyamuni or any other Buddha that is visible to every people. For details, see S.R.Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhist*, op.cit., pp. 224-226; Bhikshu Santarakshit, 'Buddhism', A.L. Basham (ed), *A Cultural History of India*, op.cit., p. 94.

²⁶ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., pp. 3-7.

²⁷ Akira Hiraka, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p.4.

in the Mahayana a large number of deities were conceived. This number grew larger in the Tantrika Buddhism.²⁸ It also incorporated many popular esoteric religious elements and indigenous deities which were had been taken as objects of worship.²⁹

From the early centuries of the Common Era³⁰, Mahayanists introduced the devotion and worship of a numbers of Buddha and Bodhisattva divinities viz. *Manjusri*, *Avalokiteswa*, *Vajrapani*, and *Sumantabhadra*.³¹ They also worshiped the female deities independently or in union with their male counterparts.³² Mahayana Buddhists believe *Bodhisattvas* as protector, and worship them with magical spell.³³ They attached great significance to magical spells and charms. The advocacy of the efficacy of *dharani* (magical incarnation or protective spell) constitutes a large and important part of Mahayana texts.³⁴ In course of time, these *dharanis* overshadowed the ethical and philosophical doctrines.³⁵

Mahayana Buddhism revealed two methods for attaining enlightenment: the method of the perfections (*Paramitayana*) and the method of *mantra* (*Mantrayana*) and the two major developments within Mahayana form that manifested in India are *Vijnanavada* (idealism) and the *Mantrayana* (popularly known as Tanticism).³⁶

²⁸ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 211-212.

²⁹ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, Sage Publications, 2003, p. 106.

³⁰ *Amitayus Sutra* or *Sukhavati vyuha* ushered the conception of Amitabha and Avalokiteswara for the first time and it translated to Chinese about 148 C.E. to 170 C.E. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1958, p. 14.

³¹ Mahayanists introduced the concept of the *Adi-Buddha* or primordial being and his manifestations. The conception of *Adi Buddha* gradually developed to five *dhyani Buddhs*. They are namely, *Vairocana*, *Akshobhya*, *Amitabha*, *Ratnasambhava* and *Amoghasiddhi*. In Nepal another *Vajrasattva*, sometimes added with these five *dhyani Buddhas*. *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 311; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-I, op.cit., pp. 518-527 and L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, (Buddhism in Tibet), Allen & com, London, 1895, p. 130.

³² *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 315.

³³ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 153-154; N. Dutta, 'Emergence of Mahayana Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, op.cit., p. 516.

³⁴ For details, see Akira Hiraka, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 3-4; Hajima Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 315.

³⁵ The Mahayana *Sutras* are often called as the epithet of *Vaipulya* (extensive and glorious) as they aimed at artistic effectiveness. For details, see S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 237; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1999, p. 477.

³⁶ A. K. Warder, 'Feudalism and Mahayana Buddhism,' R.S. Sharma (ed.), *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, People Publishing House, New Delhi, third edition, 1984, p. 172. *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 2004, p. 875; H.P. Sastri (ed.), *Advayavrajasmgraha*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. xl, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1927, p. 21; Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 362.

The origin of Mahayana and the evolution of the esoteric form of Buddhism derive from the same school of philosophy.³⁷ Both Nagarjuna and Asanga, the exponent of the *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara* school of Mahayana respectively, is regarded as the exponents of Buddhist tantricism.³⁸ Though the origin of the tantric form of Buddhism is ascribed to the Mahayanic philosophy, but there are different line of *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline and practice) as the later associates with the secretive, esoteric philosophy and practice.³⁹

Tantric system assumes some fundamental features with emphasis laid on the use of some practices such as mantras(hymns) syllables dharanis(spells), *yantras*(magical diagrams), *mandalas*, (ritualistic circles), *mudras* (physical gestures) etc.⁴⁰ Mahayana and Vajrayana incorporated various popular cults into their system.⁴¹ Gradually, all other offshoots namely, *Vajrayana*, *Kalacakrayana*, and *Sahajayana* etc. arose in later times.⁴² It has been said ‘From the *Parinirvana* of the Buddha to the sack of Nalanda by the Muslim in c.1197 C.E., that is in about seventeen centuries, Indian Buddhism passed through three main phases –Hinayana,

³⁷ Editors preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, op.cit., vol. I, p. lxii; N.B. Akira Hiraka is of the opinion that Esoterism influenced both Nikaya and Mahayana Buddhism. Akira Hiraka, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 5.

³⁸ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 1; for details, see B.Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 10; *Idem.*, *Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, Varanasi, Chokambha Sanskrit series vol. xlv, 2nd edition 1964, p. 35; Lalan Prasad Sing, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., pp. 27- 29.

³⁹ The conception of *bodhicitta* in Mahayana and in Vajrayana is not uniform. The term had one simple meaning in the Mahayana texts and its meaning became complex in Vajrayana texts. What was a mental stage of a bodhisattva’s career in Mahayana became the goal of striving and the final stage of spiritual life of Vajrayana. L.M. Joshi in *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Dept.of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, vol. iii, 1971, no. I, pp. 70-77; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 323; Pranshu Samdarshi, ‘The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions’, *The Delhi University Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 1, 2014, p. 88.

⁴⁰ *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 315; Gayatri Sen Majumdar, ‘Buddhism in Ancient Bengal’, op.cit., p.249; Akira Hiraka, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 4.

⁴¹ Simultaneously with Buddhism, Hinduism also developed their pantheons particularly from Gupta and post Gupta period, most of them are common to both religious systems. Among the various deities common to both religious systems found expression in literatures or iconography in Assam are Indra, Kubera, Kartikeya, Balabhadra and Hayagriva etc. For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist iconography*, op.cit., p. 1.

⁴² Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1949 (1st edn) reprint 1995 Calcutta, p. 17; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 321.

Mahayana and Vajrayana(esoteric or Tantric form of Buddhism)each with its characteristic features and ideas'.⁴³

The ritualistic aspects that developed within Tantricism led to the disappearance of outward differences between Hinduism and Buddhism. During the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods, Tantrism developed and shared certain common features of ritual and practice within Hinduism, Buddhism and even Jainism.⁴⁴ In course of time, Buddhist elements found expression in all the three major branches of Hinduism, namely, Sakticism, Saivism and Vaisnavism. In Assam, this syncretism is most distinctly visible in literature and iconography from the tenth and eleventh century onwards.

Mantra-yana seems as the introductory stage of tantric form of Buddhism⁴⁵ where *Mantra* (hymn or prayer) occupies an important place of it.⁴⁶ *Mantra-yana* tradition closely attached with Mahayana. According to Tibetan tradition, *Mantrayana*, originated with Nagarjuna that concerns with *mantras* (hymns) and *yantras* or magic circles.⁴⁷ Early Mahayana Buddhism was mainly based on *Sutra* literatures namely, *Prajaparamita Sutra*, *Lotus Sutra (Sadharmapundarika)* and *Avatamastaka Sutra* etc.⁴⁸ Among the Mahayana *sutra* literatures, especially, *Heart sutra* that composed between 150C.E.-200C.E.⁴⁹ shows a tendency towards development of *Mantra* tradition⁵⁰ Thus, Mantrayana was a transitional state of Mahayana to Vajrayana.

⁴³ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 238.

⁴⁴ P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of the Tantras', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, second edition, 1956, p. 221.

⁴⁵ Some earliest Buddhist works such as *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, the *Guhyasamajatantra* and *Sadharmapundarika* that assigned to second or third century C.E. were full of *mantras* and *dharanis* and its merits; For details, see B.Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture Among the Buddhists,' pp. 263- 272; B. Bhattacharya, 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *I. H.Q.*, vol. iii, 1927, no. 1, p. 742.

⁴⁶ The *Mantra-yana* tradition believes the *Mantra* as the chief means of attaining salvation. Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 331.

⁴⁷ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture Among the Buddhist,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, pp. 271-272.

⁴⁸ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 149 -158.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ Sonam Rinchen and Ruth Sonam, *The Heart Sutra: An Oral Teaching*, NewYork, 2003, p. 70.

Next stage of its development is Vajrayana, which incorporated many leading tenets of Mantrayana, and modified by local and primitive cults and practices.⁵¹ Giacomella Orofino opines:

‘The Buddhist Tantras, which constitute the final phase of Indian Buddhist literature, constitute a highly complex religious phenomenon, in which Mahayana thought coalesced with popular traditions and cults of ancient India to form a mystical and gnostic system that was highly symbolical in character. It was called the Diamond Vehicle or Vajrayana (from vajra, the "diamond" as symbol of the perfect and immutable nature of ultimate reality), and the Mantra Vehicle or Mantrayana (from mantra, the sacred formulas that were of crucial importance in this system).’⁵²

Manjusrimulakalpa, the early Mahayana work that bears the spirit of Mantrayana⁵³ gave the outward foundation of the Vajrayana system.⁵⁴ However, it does not refer to Vajrayana, *Vajra* stands for *Sunyata* that means indestructible and eternal. *Sunyata* of Vajrayana includes three principles, viz reality (*Sunyata*), consciousness (*Vijnanva*) and blisses (*Mahasukha*).⁵⁵ The distinctive feature of Vajrayana Buddhism is its rituals.⁵⁶ Vajrayanist performed various rites and rituals involving psycho-physiological realization of ultimate truth.⁵⁷ Mahayana form of Buddhism conceives *Pragya* (perfect knowledge) and *Upaya* (universal compassion)

⁵¹ From the end of the Gupta period onwards, primitive ideas of sympathetic magic and sexual mysticism more permeated to Indian religion. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, op.cit., p. 265.

⁵² Giacomella Orofino, ‘The Great Wisdom Mother and the Good Tradition’ in David Gordon White (ed.), *Tantra in Practice*, Princeton and Oxford, 2001, p. 402.

⁵³ N.B. Early Mahayana Buddhism was mainly based on *Sutra* literatures, namely *Prajaparamita Sutra*, *Lotus Sutra* (*Sadharmapundarika*) and *Avatamastaka Sutra*. The Mahayana *Sutras* are often called as the epithet of Vaipulya (extensive and glorious) as they aimed at artistic effectiveness. For details, see Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *ibid.*, p. 319 and pp. 149 -158

⁵⁴ *Manjusrimulakalpa* deals with the formulae and practices, which lead to both material prosperity and spiritual regeneration. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Sunyata* is different from the *Sunya* of *Madhyamika* or the *Vijnanvadin* (dialecticians) Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 27.

⁵⁶ According to one tradition, there are four Tantric processes of Vajrayana. They are 1. *Kriyatantra*; 2. *Caryatantra*; 3. *Yogatantra*; 4. *Annuttarayogatantra* (the process goes to nearer to sakta tantra). Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *ibid.*, p. 39; Waddell, *Lamaism*, op.cit., p. 164

⁵⁷ Gayatri Sen Majumdar, ‘Buddhism in Ancient Bengal’, op.cit., pp. 248-249.

and believes that the union of these two can lead to attain '*Boddhicitta*'.⁵⁸ In Vajrayana, this abstract principle to be realized through human body. '*Pragya*' represents woman and '*Upaya*' represents male entity and the esoteric commingling of the two is the giver of supreme bliss (*Mahasukha*). Thus, the basic principle of this tantra is the *Boddhicitta*. In course of time, the ideas of '*Pragya*' and '*Upaya*' became the symbols of Siva and Sakti.⁵⁹

Vajrayana assumed the form of an elaborate worship of all sorts of gods and goddesses of which are used as a substitute or alternative for the earlier abstract meditation. They introduced many innovations of the theory of the five Dhyani Buddha and developed large numbers of deities.⁶⁰ These deities are found mentioned in different works in different periods. Fa-Hien (394-414 C.E), mentioned *Aksobhya*, *Tathagata* and *Manjusri* as *Avalokiteswara*. Hieun-Tsang (629-645 C.E.) refers *Avalokiteswara*, *Hariti*, *Padmapani*, *Sakya Buddha*, *Matreya* and *Manjusri* and in the 8th century, Santideva (695-730 C.E), mentions *Cunda*, *Marici*, *Manjughosha* and many others, which was a period of great popularity or expansion of Tantricism.⁶¹ With the development of Tantricism in the 7th century C.E, various forces of nature physical, physiological, moral and intellectual were defined under separate personalities namely *Matri* (divine mother), *Dakini* and *Yogini* (goddess with magical power).⁶² In early Buddhism, *Mandalas* meant only a platform made of mud for conferring the code of disciple. In esoteric Buddhism, mandalas acquired great significance and configurations of pictures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas systematically arranged in Mandalas that represent a symbolical significance of meritorious deeds.⁶³ Tantra tradition, which happened to be an esoteric tradition

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249.

⁵⁹ For details, see Lalan Prasad Singh *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁰ The conception of the five 'Dhyani Buddhas emerged from Adi- Buddha or the primordial Buddha. Vajrayanist Buddha are embodiments of the the five Skandhas or cosmic *Kulas* or families of the five Dhyani Buddhas from which deities emerge according to need. For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The Cultural Heritage of India* vol-I, *op.cit.*, pp. 530-536; *The Way of the Buddha*, *op.cit.*, p. 315.

⁶¹ Benoytosh Bhattacharya says that Gurhyasamajatantra, is perhaps the first book that inculcated Vajrayana philosophy systematically and crystallized properly the Buddhist pantheon. For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *op.cit.*, p. 527.

⁶² L. A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

⁶³ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 328-29.

initially, later the Siddhacharyas popularized it among the common masses through their miraculous yogic powers.⁶⁴

Contrary to the ritualism, *mantra*-charms, etc of the vajrayana, Sahajayana system,⁶⁵ reveals an easy way, which could be beneficial and acceptable to the common masses. 'Sahaja', literally means 'to be born together', signifies that Reality and Appearance are inseparable from each other. Sahajiyas therefore try to realize the secret truth (*tattva*) by transforming and sublimating the inborn propensities of human character including the sex –impulses.⁶⁶

Sahajayana Buddhism emphasized the devotional aspects of Vajrayana. It laid more emphasis on *Guruvada* or the cult of preceptor. The selection of a proper *guru* or preceptor for guiding to initiate in the path of *Sadhana* is very important in the Sahajiya School.⁶⁷ Sahajayana school of Buddhism spread and developed by the new form of Buddhist personality represented by the Perfected one (*siddha*).⁶⁸ They represent a new form in Indian Buddhism.⁶⁹ The idea of Siddhi, psychic and supernatural power is universal in Indian religious systems. Almost all sects attach great importance to Yuga and some form or other and it is believed that the practice of Yoga yields these powers.⁷⁰ The Buddhist had introduced many non-Buddhist elements into their system and appropriated the elements of the much older Siddha tradition in India.⁷¹ The Buddhist Tantrics had attained supernatural power through the practice of *yoga*.⁷²

⁶⁴ Pranshu Samdarshi, 'The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions', *op.cit.*, p. 88.

⁶⁵ Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal', *op.cit.*, pp. 78 & 258.

⁶⁶ Unlike Vajrayanists, the Sahajiyas stress more on human body, which they take as the epitome of universe; the bodybuilding is the prime necessity in Sahajiya yogic practices, since without the body, there was no possibility of the realization of the great bliss. Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal', *op.cit.*, pp. 258-259.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁶⁸ Siddha means attainment of certain supernatural power or attainment of Siddhi by performing certain Yogic practices. They attached with mystic school and developed a kind of theology.

⁶⁹ For details, see Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, *op.cit.*, pp. 196-197.

⁷⁰ P.C. Bagchi, 'The Cult of the Buddhist Siddhacharya', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, p. 273.

⁷¹ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

⁷² For details, see *ibid.*, pp. 257-258; P.C. Bagchi, 'The Cult of Buddhist Siddhacharyas' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, pp. 273-274.

The mystic songs of Buddhist Siddhas, known as 'Caryapadas', helped in the spread of Sahajiya tenets.⁷³ There is also clear expression found in some Caryapadas about the protest against ritualism and conventionalism in the religious life of Tantric Buddhists in general.⁷⁴ It is said that, in the early period, *Mantrayana* was performed secretly and after hundreds years of secrecy, Buddhism got wide publicity and spread mainly in the society outside of the *Varnasrama*.⁷⁵ Outside the monastic disciple, the non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas⁷⁶ interacted the people of different classes of the society and spread the esoteric knowledge. Mahasiddhas such as Saraha, Luipa, Padmavajra, Anangavajra, Indrabhuti publicly preached their doctrines, encouraged the people to follow their tenets, doctrine and practices, and popularized the Sahajayana Tantricism.⁷⁷

⁷³ Siddha means attainment of certain supernatural power or attainment of *Siddhi* by performing certain Yogic practices. They attached with mystic school and developed a kind of theology centering round the esoteric doctrines and esoteric practices of *Sahajiya Buddhism*. Maheswar Neog, 'Major language and literatures of modern India; Assamese', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-v, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta, Second edition, 1978, p. 420; L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁷⁴ Sahajiya Siddha manifested their philosophy through their songs that known as *Carya Pada*. *Caryapadas* are chiefly religious nature containing its sublime thought. They not entirely attached with any philosophical school namely Madhyamika or Vedanta rather represent a Special school of religious thought of early medieval period of Eastern India. S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 50; Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 54; Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal,' *op.cit.*, p. 259.

⁷⁵ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 243; Taranatha says, "When the Tantras were handed down from Guru to disciples secretly for nearly three hundred years, they got publicity through the mystic teachings, songs and miracles of the Siddhas, Nathas and Yogis". Binoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

⁷⁶ Institutional esoterism is based on decisions predominantly made within the monastic community, and the non-institutional esoterism is the product of the Buddhist siddha culture. The former is based on decisions predominantly made within the monastic community, and the latter is the product of the Buddhist siddhaculture. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 76-77.

⁷⁷ The teachings of the Vajrayana have been handed down by a long line of persons particularly in songs of the eighty four Siddhas. The preceptor disciple tradition begun from the time of Saraha Nagarjuna and it continued up to the Sabaripa. They transmitted *Annuttara guhya mantra*; gradually *Kriya and Carya* were openly practiced. However, before the attainment of Siddhi, nobody openly practiced the yoga and *Annuttara tantras*. D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, p. 153. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 12; R.S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of Tantricism', *Indian Society: Historical probing*, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

Kalacakrayana (Kalacakra or wheel of time) was the last major product of Indian Vajrayana Buddhism, which is the culmination of Vajrayana system of esoteric practice and thought.⁷⁸ Little differences occur between Vajrayana⁷⁹ and Kalacakrayana, in respect of the method of worship, *mantras*, rites and rituals. The outward difference with Vajrayana lies in the matter of introduction of some deities that are fierce in appearance.⁸⁰ Some of the deities of *Kalacakratantra* are *Heruka*, *Acala*, *Vajra-bhairava*, *Sambhara* and *Dakinis* etc.⁸¹ The Kalacakra literature demonstrates an intimate knowledge of 'Anuttarayoga' tantras such as the *Guhyasamaja*, *Hevajra*, and *Cakrasamvara*.⁸² *Kalacakratantra* is also associated with planets and stars, astrology and astronomy.⁸³

It is believed that the original home of *Kalacakratantra* was developed about 10th century in the eastern India. After that, it became very popular in Tibet, and gradually it traveled to other parts of India and Asia.⁸⁴ Kalacakra literatures of India are mostly composed by a small group of scholars who flourished in northeastern India during the early decades of the 11th century C.E.⁸⁵ One of the most notable exponents of this system was Abyankaragupta, who was a contemporary of Ramapala (c.1077-1120 C.E.).⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Kalacakrayana attempts to explain creation and the secret power of nature by the union of female energies not only with Dhyanī Buddhas but also even with Adi-Buddha himself. Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 89; John Newman, 'Islam in the Kalacakra Tantra', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1998, p. 313.

⁷⁹ The word 'kala' means time; death and destruction, Kalacakra is the wheel of destruction, and kalacakrayana means the vehicle for protection against the wheel of destruction. The main object of the followers of the Kalacakrayana was to obstruct the ever changing Kalacakra and to keep themselves above the Kalacakra. Practically, it is not a distinct school of Tantric Buddhism, but a particular name of the Vajrayana school. As referred in Kanai Lal Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with Special Reference to India and Ceylon*, op.cit., p. 47f.

⁸⁰ Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal', op.cit., p. 257.

⁸¹ Waddell views that Kalacakra tantra is a coarse Tantric development of the *Adi-Buddha* theory combined with the puerile mysticism of the *manta-yana*, and demonical 'Buddhas' under the name of Kalacakra, *Heruka*, *Acala*, *Vajra-bhairava*, etc. L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, (Buddhism in Tibet), op.cit., p. 131.

⁸² John Newman, 'Islam in the Kalacakra Tantra', op.cit., pp. 313-316.

⁸³ B. Bhaatacarya 'Tantrika culture among the Buddhists', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, op.cit., p. 271.

⁸⁴ L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 106.

N.B. Waddell believes this system of Tantricism developed in the tenth century, in Northern India, Kashmir and Nepal. L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism* (Buddhism in Tibet), op.cit., p. 131.

⁸⁵ John Newman, 'Islam in the Kalacakra Tantra', op.cit., pp. 315-316.

⁸⁶ Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal', op.cit., p. 256.

Vajrayana Buddhism takes elements from non-Buddhist religious traditions and assimilates them to the Buddhist context. However, in the Kalacakra tantra, syncretism is unusually distinct.⁸⁷ With the development of this *Kalacakra Tantra*, innumerable Hindu deities have been incorporated in the *Mandala*(diagrams of deities) of *Sri Kalacakra* and the process of cultural fusion accelerated in India.⁸⁸ It has also been opined that *Kalacakra Tantra* was developed in order to unite Buddhists and Hindus against the Muslim invaders.⁸⁹ Thus, Buddhism of the 11th - 12th century was a unique synthesis of Mahayana ideals and tantric elements and centered round the worship of tantric divinities, magic circles and diagrams accompanied by complicated rituals and incarnations. Hajima Nakamura views that assimilation of the Hinduism and Buddhism that found expression in *Kalacakratantra* (1027-1087 C.E.) was the result of the invasion of Muhammadans of India. To quote, ‘This was a cannon urging alliance of various religions for checking the inroad of Muhammadans.’⁹⁰ The fusion between Buddhism and the native worship dates back to Nagarjuna’s time⁹¹ and reached its culmination as the medieval period drew to close.⁹²

Mahayanism provided Buddhism a more popular base and immensely widened its popular appeal. It was, therefore in India for the fear of losing ground to these more enterprising rival systems, the votaries of Brahmanical religion made a compromise. They considered Buddhist rituals and practices as the essential part of their spiritual mechanism and therefore neo Brahmanical trends absorbed those to

⁸⁷ JohnNewman, ‘Islam in the Kalacakra *Tantra*’, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

⁸⁸ For details, see Biswanath Benerjee, *Sri Kalacakratantra Raja*, New Asiatic Printers, Calcutta Park street, Calcutta, 1993, p. xiii. Both *Kalacakratantra* and *Saiva tantra* belong to the metaphysical schools of Buddhism and Hindu *Tantra*, which aim to attain the perfect enlightenment that is state of perfect Monism. The non-duality of *Kalacakra* and *Visvatmata*, and Siva with Sakti form the hallmark of these Tantric systems Neither *Visvatmata* is separated from Kalacakra, nor is Sakti separated from Siva. L. P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

⁸⁹ Biswanath Bandyopadhyaya, ‘A Note on the Kalacakratantra and its Commentary’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1952, no .18, pp. 71-76.

⁹⁰ Hajime Nakamura, *IndianBuddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 339.

⁹¹ Samuel Beal(tra.), *SiYuKi, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, vol. II, London, p. 224; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India : Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 109. N.B. Waddell views that ‘About the end of the sixth century C.E. Tantricism or Saivic mysticism, with it’s worship of female energies, spouses of Hindu god Siva, begun to tinge both Hinduism and Buddhism’. Cited in L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op,cit.*, p. 14.

⁹² *The Way of the Buddha*, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

counteract the dominating influence of Buddhism.⁹³ In the same socio-cultural environment of India, Hinduism also developed idol worship, *Bhakti*, *Puja*, *tirthayana* and tantric practices that are popularized through *Purana*.⁹⁴ In the words of N.N. Bhattacharya, “It was only after the advent of Mahayanism that there was an attempt to give Buddhism the character of a distinct religion and to take it to the masses. In doing so, the Mahayanists made compromise with the existing local and regional cults, beliefs and practices by incorporating them within the frame of their special doctrines. It was in this Mahayanic form which had the potentiality to adjust itself with the local cults and rituals that Buddhism made headway in the North-East.”⁹⁵ As there are now several points common to both Hinduism and Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism, there developed harmonious blending between Hindu and Buddhist systems.⁹⁶ In this regard, non-institutional Siddhas largely contributed to the synthesis of Buddhism and Hinduism.⁹⁷

There are differences of opinion regarding the original place of development of Mahayana Buddhism. According to an early Buddhist text *Astasahasrika prajnaparamita*, ‘Mahayanism had its origin in south whence it spread to the eastern countries and then it prospered in the north’.⁹⁸ It also opines that Mahayana began as a movement in the North-West and moved southward as it developed.⁹⁹

It has already been mentioned in the second chapter of the dissertation, that the early Buddhist remains of Assam are largely affiliated to Mahayana and

⁹³ The difference between between Hindu and Buddhist Tantra is that Buddhist tantra aims for a happy and comfortable life style for the tantric practitioner, Hindu tantra aims primarily for supremacy and power for the practitioner over his fellow men. Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, Distributors Assam Book Depot, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 2004, p. 6.

⁹⁴ For details, see D.N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 204-214; Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 28-37.

⁹⁵ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, Monarhar, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 123-124

⁹⁶ *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 313.

⁹⁷ The Mahasiddhas made contact with indigenous Indian culture previously non-Buddhist groups and synthesized many non-Buddhist methods and introduced into the Buddhist mainstream. G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra With the Commentary Yogaratnamala*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992 (1st) reprint 2001, Motilal Banarsidass, p. x.

⁹⁸ The principal center of *Mahasanghika* and their offshoots, who were forerunners of Mahayana situated in the Guntur district. Nalinaksha Dutta, ‘Emergence of Mahayana Buddhism’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, op.cit., p. 517.

⁹⁹ Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, op.cit., p. 22.

Vajrayana forms of Buddhism.¹⁰⁰ Mahayana form of Buddhism penetrated from its western boundary in the early Christian era, while the Theravadin form of Buddhism came from the Southeast Asia mainly from Myanmar (Burma), eastern boundary of Assam.¹⁰¹

The development of the forms of Buddhism in Assam

There is no clear evidence about the exact form of Buddhism that was introduced in Assam. It has been described earlier in this chapter that in the early centuries of the Common Era the common believers who did not confine to the monasteries, expressed their faith and devotion by constructing numerous stupas.¹⁰² Thus, it may be presumed that this group of Buddhists constructed the stupas of Suryapahar area. However, the literary sources such as early Mahayana works *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, and Taranatha's '*History of Buddhism in India*' throw the light about the nature of some Buddhist practices, by which we may presume the forms of Buddhism that prevailed in early Kamarupa before the rule of Bhaskararmana. Taranatha refers that one Dhitika was responsible for the propagation of Buddhism in early Kamarupa.¹⁰³ Following the reference of Taranatha, S. Sasanananda tries to establish that Thera Dhitika, who was almost contemporary of Asoka, spread the Theravada Buddhism in Assam.¹⁰⁴ S. Sasanananda cites 'Thera Dhitika' in place of 'Arya Dhitika' of the source.¹⁰⁵ The word *Arya* generally relates with Mahayana Buddhism.¹⁰⁶

The nature of propagation of Dhitika that is portrayed by Taranatha seems to Mahayana doctrine. Dhitika, using the miraculous power, spread Buddhism in

¹⁰⁰ P. C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, p. 332.

¹⁰¹ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, vol. xxix, 2004-2006, p. 206.

¹⁰² Suniti Kumer Chottopadhaya, Editor's preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, op.cit., vol. I, p. lxi.

¹⁰³ Taranatha mentions Dhitika who entrusted with the law by Arya Upagupta, was responsible for the spread of Buddhism in Assam. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, Lama Chimpa, Alaka Chottopadhya (trans.), Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1970, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁴ S. Sasanananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, Bahri Publication, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 101-103.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103; Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., p. 47

¹⁰⁶ Sthaviravada School associated with the Theravada. *Sthavira* is the Sanskrit word for elder (referring to senior monks), which in Pali is Thera. Mahayanists believe one becomes an Arya or bodhisattva by developing Bodhicitta. S.R Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 229.

Kamarupa.¹⁰⁷ Though there was strict injunction of Buddhism against the performing of miracles, it is the Mahayana path, which allows miracles to glorify the religion and to bring the ignorant to the path of *Dharma*.¹⁰⁸ Taranatha also portrays Asvabhaha preached Mahayana doctrine in Kamarupa in following words,

‘Born in a family of merchant, he became follower of the Mahayana quite in early life. He received the vision of Arya Manjusri and could recite from his memory about fifty Sutras. He never deviated from the ten-fold virtue. He preached the doctrine to a thousand *upasaka*-s and a thousand *upaiakas*. He went towards Kamarupa. His disciples reached a place on the den of a poisonous *Ajagara* snake. It was then asleep. They set up their camp by the road, which woke up the poisonous snake. It sniffed the human smell, swallowed some of the *upasaka*-s and bit many others. Those who tried to escape fell down reeling by its poisonous breath’.¹⁰⁹

M.M. Sharma opposes the authenticity of this episode. He writes, ‘If Asvabhaha really preached in Kamarupa with any effect, it should not have escaped the notice of Hieun-Tsang who visited the kingdom only a decade or two afterwards. The authority of the pilgrim is more reliable than that of Taranatha who wrote about one thousand years later’.¹¹⁰ It is to mention that Asvabhaha flourished in sixth century C.E.¹¹¹

In the second century, B.C.E. King Dutthagamani of Ceylon laid the foundation stone of the Ruwanweli or Mahathupa dahoga.¹¹² At that occasion, mention is made of various centers of Theravada Buddhism in India from which representatives went to Ceylon.¹¹³ However, in the list of the centers, there is no

¹⁰⁷ Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁸ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *NilacalaKamakhyā*, op.cit., p. 61.

¹⁰⁹ Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., p. 253. Note: Nikhileswar Sengupta looks *Ajagara* snake in this episode, represents as the symbol of the opposition led by Brahmonical society that faced by Asvabhaha. Nikhileswar Sengupta, ‘An Aspect of Buddhism in Assam’, *proceeding of North East India History Association*, session-x, 1989, p. 161.

¹¹⁰ M.M. Sharma, ‘Religion’, in H.K.Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati 1990, p. 334.

¹¹¹ Asvabhaha (c.450-530 C.E.) wrote a commentary on the Mahayana Samgraha, and this commentary was translated by *Hsuang-Tsang* in to Chinese in to ten volumes, Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, op. cit., p. 276.

¹¹² *The Way of the Buddha*, op.cit., p. 322.

¹¹³ For details, see S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult*, op.cit., p. 9.

mention about the region including Bengal. Thus, the nature of Buddhism that spread in this land by Dhitika cannot equated to Theravada school of Buddhism.

When Mahayana Buddhism had not fully developed as a separate identity,¹¹⁴ a group of Buddhists entered the region and associated with the cultic centers of non-Aryan or pre-Vedic people. It has been mentioned by Taranatha that Dhitika, using magic or sorcery, came closer to the existing place of the Sun worship by a Brahmin that also known as Siddha¹¹⁵ for the propagation of Buddhism in the region.¹¹⁶ Sun worship has been prevailing in Assam from the very early period.¹¹⁷ *Sankhayana Grihasmgra* refers to the prevalence of the worship of Sun in ancient Assam, which is of Alpine–Iranian origin.¹¹⁸ Scholar identifies Suryapahar with the place of sun worship or ‘Ravikhsetra’ that is mentioned in *Kalikapurana*.¹¹⁹ Buddhist remains at Suryapahar shows that Buddhist group got associated with the existing place of Sun worship in Assam.¹²⁰ Of course, there was no any specific mention in Taranatha’s history, about the place, where Dhitika had propagated Buddhism except ‘Kamarupa’.

¹¹⁴ In the initial stage of the development, the propounders of Mahayana seem to have been homeless ascetics who did not belong to any orthodox Sangha, around fifth century CE, it began to occupy privileged positions in selected monasteries. For details, see Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, *op.cit.*, pp.13-36.

¹¹⁵ In Mandasor stone of Bhutivarman dated c.474 C.E., siddhas are described as among those who worship the Sun, specially those who propose to obtain magical powers. Fleet 1888, pp. 79–88 as cited in Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, *op.cit.*, p. 174

¹¹⁶ Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed), *Taranatha’s History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-47.

¹¹⁷ For details, see Bijoy Kumar Sarkar ‘Iconography of a Few Seated Surya-Images from Assam: A Critical Study’ *Proceeding of 31st session of Noth-EastIndia History Association*, Tura, 2010, pp. 31-37.

¹¹⁸ Sankhyayana Grihasangraha, as referred by P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwhati, third edition (revised) 1987, p. 406.

¹¹⁹ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p. 324.

¹²⁰ Buddhism associated with Sun. *Amarkosa* mentions ‘*Arkabandhu* (friend of the sun) as one of the many synonyms of Buddha (*Gautamaca rkabandhu ca madyadevi-sutaca sah*). Nagarjuna (second century C.E.) refers to Buddha as *Aditya-bandhu* (*Madhyamika-sutra*). Biswanarayan Sastri, ‘Sun worship in Assam’, *J.A.R.S.*, 1 & 2, vol. xxxi (new series), 1989-90, p. 45.

It has been already mentioned in the chapter 2 of this dissertation that the early Buddhist groups performed their practice of Tara mantra at Kamakhya¹²¹ the place of indigenous non- Aryan mother cult.¹²²

There are several references found in *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, the early Mahayana Sutta work of pre-GurhaSamajatantra,¹²³ about the prevalence of Mantra practice in Kamarupa. It has found mentioned in the work that the Mantras given by Manjusri Kumarbhuta exercised successfully in various places including Kamarupa along with the bank of Lauhitya.¹²⁴ Mahayanists considered Manjusri Kumarbhuta as one of the important and honoured Boddhisavas.¹²⁵ There is also mention in the same work that Kamarupa was a fertilize soil for the development of the Tara formula.¹²⁶ Tara is a prominent deity of Mahayana Buddhism.¹²⁷ Again, the work also refers to about the prevalence of mantra practice of Kartikeya in Kamarupa.¹²⁸ *Nispannajokawali* of Abhyankara Gupta (C.E. 1084-1130) mentions several pantheons of Buddhism, which are also Hindu deities that are found in Puranic

¹²¹ Sometime Kamakhya is substituted by Kamarupa. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 339.

¹²² The name of Kamakhya and the mode of its worship was originated from Austric and other aboriginal cult. The fissured stone in Kamakhya at Nilachala symbolize the female cult Ka-mei-Kha gradually personified as Devi. For details, see B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004, pp. 16 & 8-40.

¹²³ For details of these views, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture Among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 263 & 272.

¹²⁴ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusri mulakalpa*, vol. II, 30 Patala (Chapter), Trivandrum Sanskrit series, no. lxxvi, 1922, p. 325.

¹²⁵ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 319.

¹²⁶ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusri mulakalpa*, vol. III, Trivandrum Sanskrit series, no. lxxxiv, 1925, p. 648; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 32. P.C. Choudhary, Assam Bengal Relations, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, p. 303.

¹²⁷ 'Tara is the supreme female goddess of Mahayana pantheon' *The Way of the Buddha*, *op.cit.*, p. 314.

¹²⁸ 'Kartikeyashya e mantrah kathita Manjubhanina
Tasmidese tada sidhi bhabiswati na sansaya
Sriparbate tada dese Vindhyakuksinitambayu
Dipebyeya cha sarbata Kalingadesu kityate
Trrygunya Mlecchadesesu samantata
Ambhug kukshiniranta nripakhyanta anantaka
Kamarupakalakhy hi Himadre kuksimasrita.....' *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* vol. III, *op.cit.*, p. 628. N.B. A numbers of Kartikeya image found in different parts of Assam, suchs as, Da-Parvatiya , Urvasi, Devastan (Nagaon district), for details see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, vol. I, pp. 364-366 & 375-376.

literature and Kartikeya was one of them.¹²⁹ Thus, the nature of the Buddhism in Kamarupa that reflects in *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, is undoubtedly Mahayana, because of the prevalence of Mahayana deities with mantra practice.

The above discussion shows that the Buddhist groups, after coming to the region, developed meditational practice centering round stupa worship and mantra practice,¹³⁰ which are some important elements of Mahayana Buddhism. *Mantrayana* is the introductory stage of tantric form of Buddhism. The practice, associated with the efficacy of mantras, magic spells, etc. gave birth to a new form of Mahayanism, which is broadly known as Tantric Buddhism.¹³¹ Gradually, with the association of indigenous, existing religious system, Buddhists had developed tantric practice. Both the areas viz. Surya Pahar and Nilachala, presumably the original center of Buddhist practice in Assam developed as places of tantric centers in succeeding periods.¹³²

Vajrayana in Assam

It has been mentioned already in the second chapter of this dissertation that Kamarupa emerged as one of the important centers of Vajrayana among the four Vajrayana centers that is situated in India in the seventh-eight century.¹³³ Tantric form of Buddhism or Vajrayana developed with the incorporation of Sakti element of Mahayana.¹³⁴ There are four female deities, namely, Locana, Mamaki, Pandara and Tara, worshipped by the followers of Vajrayana. Among this group of four, the

¹²⁹ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, pp. 2-3 & 364.

¹³⁰ The association of Buddhists with female cult found referred in the first and second century C.E. Buddhist work *Lotus sutra* or *Sadharmapundarika*. For details, see Hajime Nakamura *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 334.

¹³¹ N. Dutta, 'Emergence of Mahayana Buddhism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, v. 1, op cit., p. 516; *The Way of the Buddha*, op cit., p. 315.

¹³² There are some *Siva Lingas* along with *Younipith* found in the stupa complex of Surya Pahar area. The *Siva Lingas* along with *Younipith* represent Siva and Sakti, which always play an important role in tantra. Thus, it suggests that the place also developed as Tantrik center.

¹³³ *Hevajra Tantra* was composed shortly before 693 C.E., mentions the four important Vajrayana *Peethas* (sacred places) are *Jalandhara*, *Oddiyana*, *Purnagiri* and *Kamarupa*. For details, see B. Bhattacharya 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *I.H.Q.*, vol. iii, no. 1, 1927, pp. 733-746; D.C. Sircar, 'Sakta Pithas', *J RASB*, vol. xiv, no. I, 1948, p. 12.

¹³⁴ Sakti is one of the important principles of esoteric practice for obtaining emancipation since the very origin of the Tantra. For details, see Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic culture in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1967, p. 279f ; L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op cit., p. 36 ; P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve Century A.D*, Spectrum publication third edition (revised), 1987, p. 422.

most prominent deity is Tara.¹³⁵ During the period of mantrayana tradition, *Tara mantra* was practiced in Kamarupa. It is said that *Tara Tantra* is a secret *tantra* belonging to *Yoga-Tantra* class, which prescribed the revolting practices.¹³⁶ This Tara was worshipped as Mahacina SwetaTara along with Sambara Heruka at Kamakhya in the seventh–eight century¹³⁷ when Kamarupa developed as a center of Vajrayana. There are various Vajrayana pantheons such as Sambara Heruka, Kurukulla Vajravarahi and Vajra-Vairocini were prevailed in Kamakhya.¹³⁸ Thus, the mantra vehicle of Mahayana form developed to Vajrayana that occurred entirely outside the established Buddhist monastic framework.

As discussed in the previous chapter of the dissertation, there are number of images such as Avalokitesvara Hariti, Chunda Kubera etc. affiliated to Mahayana and Vajrayana¹³⁹ found in Assam. There are some terracotta images of Buddha in *bhumisparsamudra* (The Buddha is seated cross-legged, his left hand rests in his lap, and his right hand is draped over his right knee, touching the earth) also found in Assam. The Buddha in *bhumisparsamudra* represent the point at which Sakyamuni achieves enlightenment.¹⁴⁰

David Snellgrove identified several *bhumisparsa* Buddha images of the early Pala-period of Bengal as Aksobhya as the *Guhyasamajatantra* and other *anuttarayoga* tantra texts define Aksobhya's characteristic hand gesture is the *bhumisparsamudra*.¹⁴¹ The *Guhyasamaja* 'the Bible of the Tantric Buddhists' articulated Akshobhya as one among the five *dhyaniBuddhas* sits in

¹³⁵ Naresh Mantri, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies*, vol. xx, no. 1, 1971, pp. 152-153 as referred in Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 334.

¹³⁶ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, Oxford University press, London, 1938, Motilal Banarsidss, 2009, Delhi, p. 280.

¹³⁷ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

¹³⁸ 'Kamakhya-Kameswari has evolved due to intermixing of Buddha cult of Chinnamasta-Vajravarahi and Kameswari cult.' Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, pp. 4, 14 & 46.

¹³⁹ B. Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheons', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, pp. 526-527.

¹⁴⁰ Jacob Kinnard, 'Reevaluating the Eighth-Ninth Century Pala Milieu: Icono-Conservatism and the Persistence of Sakyamuni', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, Winter 1996, pp. 281-301.

¹⁴¹ David Snellgrove (ed.), *The Image of the Buddha*, Paris, UNESCO, 1978 as referred in Jacob Kinnard, 'Reevaluating the Eighth-Ninth Century Pala Milieu: Icono-Conservatism and the Persistence of Sakyamuni', *ibid.*

bhusparsamudra.¹⁴² As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, that Kamarupa was a center of Vajrayana. Thus, it can be presumed that the images of Buddha in *bhumisparsa* that is found in the region represent Sakyamuni in a tantric form and not the Sakyamuni of the Pali and Mahayana texts.

Sahajayana and Assam

Sahajayana school of Buddhism i.e. one of the offshoots of Vajrayana was spreaded and developed by Sahajiya *siddhas*. According to the tradition, the number of the Buddhist Siddhas was eighty –four that flourished mainly from the 10th to 12th centuries.¹⁴³

The activities of the Sahajiya Buddhist are confined mostly in eastern India, Tibet and Nepal. They generally attached with the monasteries such as Nalanda Odantapuri Vikramsila, Somapura, Devikota and Phullahari etc.¹⁴⁴ These Siddhas of Sahajayana School formed a wide cultural zone in this part of the region including Assam, Bengal, Nepal, Tibet and China and developed a common bond of kinship.¹⁴⁵ The Siddha *Sadhana* involved the practice of a new form of Yoga developed by the Siddhacarya. According to it, there were thirty-two nerve channels (*nadis*) within the body, they are known as *lalana*, *rasana*, *avadhuti* etc. There are also numbers of other stations called either lotuses or wheel within the body. They are compared with the places of pilgrimage like Uddiyana, Jalandhar, Purnagiri and Kamarupa.¹⁴⁶ It has been said that in Assam, the Sahajiya had established strong holds in Rangjuli, Bijoyapura (Barnagar), Kondoli, Dovaka and Bajulia and associated these places with the heroes of their songs and ballads.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² B. Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheons', *op.cit.*, p. 534.

¹⁴³ P.C. Bagchi, 'The cult of Buddhist Siddhacaryas' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, pp. 273-274.

¹⁴⁴ Manikuntala Halder (De), *Baudha Dharmer Itihas* (in Bengali), MahaBodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 1996, reprint 2007 Kolkata, p. 230; S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult*, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁴⁵ The period was marked by both sociopolitical contact with other parts of India. In the middle of the 8th century.C.E.i.e in the period of Harshavarmadeva (725-750C.E.) Kamarupa extended its boundaries that touched parts of Bengal and Orissa and concluded relationship with Nepal.

¹⁴⁶ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 258-259.

¹⁴⁷ RajmohanNath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, Datta Barua, Guwahati, 1978, p. 47.

There are numbers of *Sahajiya Siddhas* hailed from Assam.¹⁴⁸ Saraha is one of the earliest Buddhist Siddhacarya¹⁴⁹ associates with Assam. Based on the Tibetan work *Grub-to'b*, Giuseppe Tucci mentions that Rahula alias Saraha was a *Sudra* from Kamarupa.¹⁵⁰ P. C. Choudhary believes he was from Oddiyana but his activities were confined to Rani or Roli.¹⁵¹ K.L. Barua identifies Roli or Rani with the principality of Rani in western part of Guwahati of modern Kamrup district of Assam.¹⁵² Mahasiddha Saraha flourished about the year 1000 C.E. It is believed that Saraha converted Ratnapala who was probably a king of Kamarupa to Buddhism. The former therefore flourished towards the end of the tenth or beginning of the 11th century C.E.¹⁵³ He composed *Buddha Kapala-tantrasya panjika*, *jnanavati-nama*, *Buddha Kapala sahana*, *Dohakosa giti*, and *Saraha gitika* etc.¹⁵⁴ The language of some of the Caryas of Saraha represents the earliest phase of the development of the Assamese language.¹⁵⁵ His center of activities was in the Kamarupa region.¹⁵⁶

Nagarjuna is another noted Buddhist Siddha who was associated with Assam. He was the disciple of Rahula or Saraha and flourished not long before the visit of Alberuni in India in 1030C.E.¹⁵⁷ Nagarjuna was associated with two Sadhana namely *Ekjata* and *MahacinaTara*.¹⁵⁸ It is believed that Ratnapala or his successor

¹⁴⁸ For details see P.C. Bagchi, 'The cult of the Buddhist Siddhacarya', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, op.cit., p. 276; B. Bhattacharya, *Origin and development of Vajrayana*, op.cit., pp. 745-746.

¹⁴⁹ L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 65.

¹⁵⁰ *Journal of Asiatic society of Bengal*, vol.xxvi, p. 141, as cited K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, 1934, no. 2, p. 47; Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., p. 136; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., p. 340.

¹⁵¹ In *Bka-AbabBdum Idan*, Saraha is said to have been from Brahman from Odivisa that represents Orissa. As cited in P. C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 305 ; Bhupendranath Datta (tr.), *Mystic tales of Lama Taranatha*, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 2-4.

¹⁵² K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, 1934, no. 2, pp. 45-47; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., pp. 340-341; P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth century A.D.*, p. 423.

¹⁵³ For details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of North East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p. 72; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., pp. 340-341.

¹⁵⁴ D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., p. 382.

¹⁵⁵ Parikshit Hazarika, *Carya Pada*, Dalimi Prakashan, Guwahati, seventh edition, 2007, p. 45; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I op.cit., p. 340.

¹⁵⁶ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, op.cit., p. 128.

¹⁵⁷ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., pp. 340-341.

¹⁵⁸ For details, see K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, 1934, no. 2, p. 46-47; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, p. 305.

Indrapala built the present Ugratara temple of Uzanbazar area in Gauhati, after the introduction of worship of Ekjata by Nagarjuna.¹⁵⁹ Siddha Nagarjuna was also a famous *Kaviraj* or physician and certain medical pills, still prevailed in the Assam Valley, which are associated with his name and being prepared according to his prescriptions.¹⁶⁰

Another Siddha is Luipada, who is believed as one of the *Adi-siddhacharyas*.¹⁶¹ Sometimes the name of the Siddhas attaches with the land that they hailed from or associated. Siddha Hadipa is also known as Jaladharipa on accounts of his long residence in Jalandhar.¹⁶² The name of LuiPada is the identical with *Luhita*. Brahmaputa in early Assam is better known as *Luhita*. It is to note here that the river *Lauhitya* is found expression in the inscriptions of Assam from 8th century onwards and homage was paid to river *Lauhitya* (Brahmaputra) because of benefit from the river in strategic, material, commercial and cultural matters.¹⁶³ The language that he used in some of his works was *Kamarupi aprabhamsa*.¹⁶⁴ Accordingly, it may presume that Luipada might have hailed or associated with Kamarupa.

He has been mentioned as the author of the texts, such as *Bhagavad-Abhisamaya*, *Vajrasattva Sadhana*, *Tattvasvabhava-Dohakosha-Gitikia-Drishti-Nama*, *Luhipada-Gitika* and *Buddhodaya*.¹⁶⁵ The Padas 1 and 29 of the *Charyageetikosha* or the *Caryapada* are also ascribed to him.¹⁶⁶ The period of Luipada is placed in the 11th century C.E. It is on the ground that Luipada was contemporary to Sri Dipankara. When SriDipankara went to Tibet in 1038 C.E., he

¹⁵⁹ Tara, Buddhist goddess entered in to Hindu fold as UgraTara H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 341; Biswanarayan Sastri, 'Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam, *J.A.R.S.*, xxxii, p. 4; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁰ K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *op.cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁶¹ The first *Caryapada* was attributed to Luipa and in its commentary in Sanskrit, Munidatta mentions him as the *Adisiddhacharya*. Haraprasad Shastri, *Hajar Bacharer Purano Bangala Bhashay Bauddhagan O Doha* (in Bengali), Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata, 1916, reprint, 2006, p. 5.

¹⁶² R.M. Nath, 'Luipada and Matsyendranatha', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.vii, no. 1, 1939, pp. 48-57.

¹⁶³ M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Department of Ancient Assam, Guwahati University, 1978, p. 136.

¹⁶⁴ Parikshit Hazarika, *Carya Pada*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁵ D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, p. 393.

¹⁶⁶ Haraprasad Shastri, *Hajar Bacharer Purano Bangala Bhashay Bauddhagan O Doha* (in Bengali) *op.cit.*, p. xxi.

was assisted by Luipada.¹⁶⁷ He has also been mentioned as the co-author of the *Abhisamaya-Vibhanga* along with the great scholar Atisa.¹⁶⁸ According to Taranatha, Nagarjuna was the teacher of Savaripa and latter's disciple was Luipada.¹⁶⁹

Another most important Siddha who contributed to the development of syncretic traditions between Hinduism and Buddhism is Minnatha or Matsyendranatha. Some scholars identify Matsyendranatha with Luipada.¹⁷⁰ However, the doctrinal difference between the two reveals that they were two different persons.¹⁷¹ Matsyendranatha is figured as the spiritual son and successors of Jalandha, who had initiated the four main disciples, namely Gorakhnath, Pangal, Nimnath and Parsanath.¹⁷² Taranatha referred Mina as the disciple of Kukkuti Siddha who was the fisherman on the east of India.¹⁷³ Siddha Minnatha was a fisher who was associated with Kamarupa. The site where fisher Mina was in deep contemplation as mentioned in the Buddhist legend is identical with Brahmaputra and Umanada.¹⁷⁴ He was constantly associated with Kamarupa and compiled famous Buddhist tantric texts *Akulviratantra* in Kamarupa.

The association of Minnatha with Kamarupa is confirmed by the colophon to the concluding chapter of his *Akulaviratantra* where it is clearly mentioned that he received spiritual inspiration from the *yoginis* at Kamarupa and *Akulviratantra* was compiled in Kamarupa (*iti -Kamarupasthan Yogini-Prasadat labadhan Akulviram sampatam*).¹⁷⁵ The association of Minnatha with Kamarupa is also reflected in the

¹⁶⁷ Parikshit Hazarika, *Caryapada*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁸ Sukumar Sen, *Charyageeti Padabali* (in Bengali), Ananda Publishers, Kolkata, 2002, pp. 20-1

¹⁶⁹ Luipada was a writer of the court of the king of Uddiyana and named as Samanta Subha before the meeting with Savaripa. Bhupendranath Datta (tr.), *Mystic tales of Lama Taranatha*, *op.cit.*, p. 8; D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, p. 151; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 341.

¹⁷⁰ For details, see P.C. Bagchi, 'The cult of Buddhist Siddhacaryas' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 276.

¹⁷¹ For the details, see R.M. Nath, 'Luipada and Matsyendranatha', *op.cit.*, pp. 48-57.

¹⁷² G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁷³ N.B. Minnatha was referred as Matsindrapada, Matsendranatha, Minnatha and Macchagana. Taranatha mentions Mina and Maccindra as different person. Siddha Maccindra is referred as the son of Siddha Mina. Bhupendranath Datta, (tr.), *Mystic tales of Lama Taranatha*, *op.cit.*, pp. 74-75.

¹⁷⁴ For details, see Bhupendranath Datta (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, *op.cit.*, p. 74; G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

¹⁷⁵ Vide. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of India*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, pp. 278.

Jayaratha's commentary of *Tantraloka* of Abhinavagupta.¹⁷⁶ The Buddhist tantric background of the land inspired Minnatha to choose the place for composition of the tantric literature. Siddha Mina was followed by the people of different professional classes viz. Hali (a peasant), Mali (a gardener), Tambuli (a tooth painter or betel leaf seller).¹⁷⁷ Thus, in the early medieval period, Sahajiya Siddhas flourished in Assam. Though there is no any authentic evidence of the existence of monasteries center, the non-institutional Sahajiya Siddhas were quite influential in this region.

Buddhist tantrics generally performed four processes of Tantric practices. They are 1. *Kriyatantra*; 2. *Caryatantra*; 3. *Yogatantra*; and 4. *Annuttarayogatantra* (the process goes to nearer to sakta tantra).¹⁷⁸ It seems that the Siddhas from the region performed all these practices. Siddhas Saraha and Luipa publicly preached *Kriya* and *Carya tantra*. Luipa attained the *Mahamudrasiddhi* by studying the *Cakrasambhara* system.¹⁷⁹ They also performed *Annuttarayogatantra*, which is a secret tantra.¹⁸⁰ From the time of Saraha and Nagarjuna up to Sabaripa had entered the tradition of transmitting *Annuttara Gurhya –mantra* through the chain of preceptor to disciple.¹⁸¹ Thus, the Sahajiya Siddhas of Assam performed all higher Tantras.¹⁸² Naropa is another tantric saint first introduced the name 'Varahi' and repeatedly mentioned the name in his works *Kriya vajra varahi* and *Jnana vajra varahi*. He had perhaps constant touch with the region. It is believed by scholar that the name of Varahi was taken from some Buddhist female saint living on the Varaha hill of Nilacala hill complex.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁶ It has mentioned ' *Bhairavat praptam yogam vyapya priya tatsakasattu Siddhena minakhyena varanane Kamarupe mahapithe Macchandena mahatmanain Tantraloka*, ' pp. 24-25 as cited B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), vol.I, Bina library, Guwahati, fourth edition, 2003, p. 188

¹⁷⁷ Bhupendranath Datta (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, op.cit., pp. 74-75.

¹⁷⁸ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 39; S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 239.

¹⁷⁹ Debiprasad Chattopahaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., p. 153.

¹⁸⁰ In *Annuttara yoga tantra*, all gods are represented as embracing their Saktis and rites performed to get nirvana accompanied by a circle of female Bodhisattvas (Locana, Mamaki, Pandara and Tara). G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, op.cit., p. 283.

¹⁸¹ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 14.

¹⁸² Kacakratanta is the highest kind of Yoga tantra. L.P. Singh, *Buddhist tantra*, op.cit., pp. 93-95.

¹⁸³ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 7.

There are some prime deities of *Kalacakratantra* viz. *Heruka* and *Vajrabhairava*,¹⁸⁴ who were worshipped in Kamarupa (Nilachala). Abhinavagupta who flourished in Kamarupa about 9th century C.E.,¹⁸⁵ has discussed *Kalacakra* in detail in his *Tantraloka*.¹⁸⁶ Naropa was one of the founder saints of *Anuttara* and *Kalacakra tantra*¹⁸⁷ is believed to be associated with this land. Thus, it indicates about the prevalence of *Kalacakrayana* in Assam.

Kalacakratantra accelerated the process of assimilation between Hinduism and Buddhism. Though there are traces of the prevalence of some of the *Kalacakratantra* deities in Assam, but due to the gradual amalgamation of the deities with Hinduism in succeeding period, no pure forms of *Kalacakratantra* is visible in Assam. However, the syncretism between Buddhism and three major branches of Hinduism viz. Saktism, Saivism and Vaisnavism are found expression in literature and iconography in Assam.

Syncretism is an essential feature of the religion. It has been opined that the term syncretism generally denotes an unconscious, wide spread tendency to coalesce due to the meeting of different cultures. There is a blending of religious ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts more or less thoroughly the principles of another or both are amalgamated in a more cosmopolitan than narrow theistic sense.¹⁸⁸ When two or more religions were contemporary to each other, there was always a strong tendency towards fusing their Gods. When a religion became dominant and powerful in any particular region, it generally absorbed the characteristics as well as deities of the other contemporary religions. It was the case

¹⁸⁴ Waddell is of the opinion that *Kalacakra* is the development of *Adi-buddha* theory combined with puerile mysticisms of the *Mantrayana* introduced demonical Buddhas under the names of *Sambhara*, *Kala-Cakra*, *Heruka*, *Achala*, *Vajra-Vairava* etc., L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁸⁵ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1960, p. 99; K.C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta a Historical and philosophical Study*, vol.1, Chowkambha Sanskrit Series office, Benaras, 1935, p. 2 .

¹⁸⁶ Abhinavagupta in his *Tantraloka* has expounded the doctrine of *Kala* (time) and the spiritual process of keeping oneself above the influence of cycle of time. L. P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁸⁷ Naropa was born in Bengal in the city of *Nagara*, esteemed in his East Indian hermitage of *Phulahari*. For details, see Ronald.M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 45 & 126.

¹⁸⁸ James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol.xii, New York, 1974, pp. 155-156.

with Buddhism too.¹⁸⁹ The Syncretism between Buddhist practice and Brahminism in Assam is visible in following major Brahmanical divisions in Kamarupa.

Syncretism with Saktism

Kamarupa is traditionally recognized as an important Sakta center and the abode of Hindu deity Kamakhya. However, the Hindu deity Kamakhya developed through a long process of psychosexual experimentation, philosophies that contributed by the both Buddhist and Hindus. In early period, the Austric and other earliest inhabitant of Assam worshipped the fissured stone that personified as Devi at Nilachala.¹⁹⁰ It is to say that the concept of sakti or primordial energy symbolized in a woman is an amalgam of many elements drawn from various sources, aboriginal, non-Aryan (not- excluding non-Indian) and Aryan.¹⁹¹ Although the cult of mother goddess existed even in the earlier period¹⁹², it became central to tantricism that developed widely during Gupta and post-Gupta periods.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Sarita Khettry, 'Buddhism and Conemporary Religios of the North-West: Syncretism, Assimilation and Conflict (c.First century B.C. –c. fifth Century C.E.)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 69th session, Kanpur, 2008, pp. 70-73.

¹⁹⁰ Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ Saktism means worshipping a female goddess as the supreme deity. H.K Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 317-318 & 366; M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁹² The female cult has worshipped across the world along with Indus Valley. Concerning the female cult in Vedic tradition, there are occasional references of Ambika and Uma (*taitareyarya Aranyaka* or *Kena Upanishad* (3/25) found in *Vedic* literature however, not as prominent deity. see for details Govinda Gopal Mukherje, 'Sakta Literature,' *The Culture Heritage of India*, vol.v, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁹³ During the Gupta period, female deity, mostly of tribal origin and background attained a position of importance and clearly associated with the important Brahmanical gods. The *Sakti* elements in Hindu literatures attained its maturity in Puranic period. The *Devimahatmya* of the *Markandeya Purana* (c. sixth century C.E.) is the first comprehensive account of the goddess to appear in Sanskrit-the explanation is sought in terms of Sanskritisation. *MarkandeyaPurana* composed about second and third century C.E. The chapters lxxxi-xciii of the *Markandeya Purana* constitute an independent and complete work called *Devi-Mahaytma*. Rajenndra Chandra Hazra, 'The Puranas' in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.II, pp. 253-256; Govinda Gopal Mukherje, 'Sakta Literature', *The Culture Heritage of India*, vol.v, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-134; D.N. Jha, *Early India*, *op.cit.* p. 170.

Mahayana Buddhist inclined towards female cult that found reference in early Mahayana Buddhist works.¹⁹⁴ Thus, both Hinduism and Buddhism were associated with female cults. The Buddhist group associated with the non-Aryan cultic site at Nilachala and worshipped Tara deity. Female spirits were an integral part of tantra and gave the utmost importance to female divinities.¹⁹⁵ Buddhist tantricism developed in Nilachala with female deity Sweta Tara and Vajrayogini. Side by side with the Buddhist tantric deities, Hinduised form of Tantricism was developed there with the female deity Mahagauri and gradually, by the eleventh century, the Hinduise deity Kameswari Kamakhya replaced this Mahagauri.¹⁹⁶

Pranab Jyoti Dekha in his book *Nilacala Kamakhya* discussed in details how the goddess Kamakhya Kameswari has evolved through the intermixing of the Buddha cult of Chinnamasta-Vajravarahi and Hindu Kameswari cult. *Kamakhya-Kameswari* was conceptualized from the synthesizing Hindu *SaktiTantra* and *Boudha Annuttara tantra*. The seed of incarnation of the tantra for the goddess Kamakhya addressed to Vajra-Yogini, VajraVarahi and Vajra-Vairocini, which became closely associated in the form of Chinnamasta and Bouddha Chinnachamunda in 9th century. This Chinnachamunda in course of time was modified to Kamakhya Kameswari cult.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the deity Kamakhya, which seems appeared as a new deity in the early-medieval Brahmanical literature of Assam was contributed by both the Buddhist tantricism and new Brahmanical religion.

¹⁹⁴ In some *dharanis* of the *LotusSutra* or *Sadharmapundarika*, that compiled between first and second century C.E. some hymns were addressed to female deities. According to Binoytosh Bhattacharya, the inclination of Buddhism to female cult first revealed in *Gurhyasamajatantra*, the bible of Tantric Buddhism, compiled about 300 C.E.; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Mahayanic Pantheon', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. 526; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁹⁵ Pranshu Samdarshi, 'The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions', *op.cit.*, p. 93.

¹⁹⁶ For details, see Pranav Jyoti Dekha, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁹⁷ For details, see *ibid.* pp. 4, 14, 23 & 43-46.

Nevertheless, Kamakhya is Hindu goddess but her roots lie in the Boudha vajrayana Tantricism.¹⁹⁸

In Buddhist tantra, the superiority of goddesses comes across in a substantial way and goddesses who embodied supreme enlightenment were designated as “the Buddhas” and the mother of all Buddhas.¹⁹⁹ Buddhist deity Tara occurs in the *Manjusrimulakalpa* is elevated to the position of highest deity where she is elevated to the position of highest deity. Gradually, Tara rose to the mother ship of all Buddha and the concept developed that creation itself is due to the sakti or female energy of Adi-Buddha. Accordingly, the Goddess is recognized as the ultimate source of everything in the universe.²⁰⁰ This concept also developed in Hinduism. In course of time, the *Kalikapurana* portrayed Kamakhya as the spouse of Siva and gave a new shape connecting with pan Indian mythology and the deity became pan-Indian Brahmanical mother goddess.²⁰¹

Syncretism with Saiva

The Tantric Buddhist practices were syncretised with another prime deity of Hinduism, i.e. Siva. There is age-old association between tantric Buddhism and Saivism that mutually influenced each other and sometimes Buddhist appropriated their belief and faith with Saivite practice. Vajrayana adopted a number of forms of Mahadeva Siva and accordingly, Hara became Heruka, Sambhu became Sambara, and Bhairava turned into Vairocana etc.²⁰² Saivite influences in the forms mostly of

¹⁹⁸ Until ninth century, there were not even veil references of Kamakhya that found in the inscription. The deities Kamakhya-Kameswari first time appeared in the ninth century inscription. Kameswari –Mahagauri is mentioned in Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamala (line 10 -12) of 9th century. Guwakuchi grant of Indrapala (the line 49) of 11th century (c1071 C.E) also mentions Mahagauri –Kamesvarayoh. The Brahmanical literature *Kalika Purana* of 10th- 11th century elaborately portrayed the deity. For details, see M.M. Sarma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, pp.104, 112 & 202.

¹⁹⁹ Pranshu Samdarshi, ‘The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions’, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

²⁰⁰ N.N. Bhattacharya, *The Indian Mother Goddess*, New Delhi, Manohar, 2nd edition, 1977, p. 210.

²⁰¹ Parallel to the development of pan-Indian socio-political ideology, regional elements started to take shape through assimilation with greater tradition of the region. *Kalika Purana* appropriated local cults through common rituals, including the cults that associated with Buddhism in greater Indian perspective and developed the concept of Pan-Indian Hinduise mother goddess. For further details, see Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Making of Early Medieval India*, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-34.

²⁰² Hara Sambhu and Bhairava are among the various names of Siva. Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

Kapalika and the Pasupata faith, influenced Buddhist tantras²⁰³ Saivite influences found distinct in the Buddhist Tantric literature. One of such tantric text is *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, which is significantly influenced by Saiva Hindu faith.²⁰⁴ Kalacakratantra and *Saiva-Tantra* is to some extent similar in both philosophical and ritualistic aspects.²⁰⁵ Tibetan regarded Kailasa as the home of Samvara, the well-known Saiva site just inside the Tibetan border and thus Buddhist appropriated the Saiva site replacing Siva by Samvara on Mount Kailasa.²⁰⁶

The Syncretism between Saivism and Buddhism is found expression in the myth and iconographic expression in Assam. In early Assam, Siva worship was prevalent amongst both the Aryan and non-Aryans.²⁰⁷ Buddhism also had its contact with its inhabitants before the development of the Aryan culture to the life and thought of the people of Assam.²⁰⁸ Thus, these two faiths came into constant touch with each other. In Sri Surya Pahar, where the votive stupas of early centuries are found, the *lingas* are made on the same platform. The Brahmanical sculptures of the area are said as the product of the ninth century idiom.²⁰⁹

The myth recorded in the *Kalikapurana* focuses the alliance between followers of Buddhism and Siva against the *Dvija* or twice born Brahmana. According to this myth, this Siva was assisted by his ally of the followers of Ugratara against Vasistha and other twice born (*Dvija*).²¹⁰ The followers of Ugratara

²⁰³ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 211-221.

²⁰⁴ The *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, in its initial stage of development, was composed outside of normative monastic Buddhist institutional. The earliest version of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* was a somewhat shorter text that exhibited significant influence from Saiva Hindu sources and relatively little Buddhist influence. For details, see David Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: A Study and Annotated Translation*, American Institute of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 13-14.

²⁰⁵ L.P. Singh, *Buddhist Tantra* op.cit., p. 106.

²⁰⁶ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 210.

²⁰⁷ B.K. Kakati, 'The Mother goddess Kamakhya', op.cit., p. 10.

²⁰⁸ In the words of N.D. Choudhary, 'No sculptures of Brahmanical religion (Saivism Vaisnavism and Saktism) have been found in Assam earlier than 5th -6th century C.E, which can also be taken as an indirect proof that a large section of people of Assam accepted Buddhism and continued it till 4th - 5th C.E. Thus, Buddhism was developed much earlier than the development of Brahmanical religion in the region. Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,' op.cit., p. 215.

²⁰⁹ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., pp. 463-464.

²¹⁰ Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), *Kalika purana Murtivinirdesha*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, pp. xxv - xxvii; Jyotindra Narayan (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, Dutta Barua Publishing Company, Guwahati, 2007, ch. 81, p. 300; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 18.

undoubtedly represent the followers of Buddhism.²¹¹ Thus, the episode of the legend indicates the closeness of Saivism and Buddhism in Kamarupa. The association between these two faiths is also suggested by the fact that in winter season Buddhists from Himalayan region still visit Umananda, the abode of Siva.²¹²

The syncretism between Buddhism and Saivism in Assam is best reflected in cult *Heruka*. *Heruka* (Tibetan *khrag 'thung*) is one of the most popular Tantric Buddhist pantheons, particularly in Tibet.²¹³ There are various forms of *Heruka* referred in *Sadhanamala*. In Vajrayana, *Heruka* rarely represented single but usually in the embrace of his consort *Vajrabarahi*. When he is in *yab-yum* (embracing his female consort), *Heruka* is known as *Hevajra* which is the popular form of *Heruka* in Tibet.²¹⁴ This *Heruka* was worshipped in Kamarupa (at Nilachala) in the form of Sambara *Heruka* along with its consort *Tara Kurukilla*.²¹⁵ The concept of *Heruka* is revealed in *Kamakhyā tantra*, which is an offshoot of *Hevajra tantra*.²¹⁶

There are many myths centering round the origin of *Heruka*. According to one of them, *Heruka* emanates from *Vajrapani* who caused trouble to the twenty-four sites of *Bhairava* and destroys *Maheswara*.²¹⁷ It seems, the deity appeared in the world to subjugate the Hindu deity *Bhairava* or *Siva*. *Heruka* is also portrayed as the image of *Maheswara*. In *Sadhanamala*, he is defined as standing on a corpse in the *Ardhaparanyaka* attitude. He is well clad in human skin and his body besmeared with ashes.²¹⁸ Thus, scholar believes that *Heruka* has taken the image of *Maheswara*—the wearing of skulls, ashes and other adornments to attract to the noble

²¹¹ Ugratara, the Goddess of Buddhist Tantricism, in in course of time became Hinduised. B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 19.

²¹² Gangaram Choudhary, *Sapta Bodhisattvas and their sculptural Representation in Assam*, Assam Research Society for Buddhistic Studies, Guwahati, Assam, 1967, p. 8.

²¹³ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 155.

²¹⁴ Haraprasad Sastri, 'The Northern Buddhism', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol-1, no-3, 1925, p. 472; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., pp. 155-156.

²¹⁵ For details See Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 46.

²¹⁶ *Hevajra Tantra* advises a person full of desire to unite with the perception of sixteen forms of void (union of *Prajna* with *upaya* is *Heruka*). For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, ibid., p. 63.

²¹⁷ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 202; *idem.*, 'Relections on the Maheswara Subjugation Myth Indic materials, Sa-Skya-pa Apologetics and the myth of *Heruka*' in Paul Williams, (ed.) *Buddhism, Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, vol.vi, Routledge, London, Newyork, 2005, pp.1-32.

²¹⁸ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 156.

Buddhadharma those of the lowest moral level.²¹⁹ The origin of the Heruka myth that referred in *Sarvabuddhasamayoga*, describes Heruka in the manner of a cemetery divinity.²²⁰

On the other hand, in a myth in *Kalikapurana* Heruka was portrayed as born out of Siva. When goddess Mahamaya came forth having pierced through the *Sivalinga*, it was broken into three pieces. From the three pieces of Siva linga there came out Bhairava, Bhairavi and Heruka.²²¹ This Heruka is also described in *Kalikapurana* as the manner of a cemetery divinity, rather than either as the tamer of Maheswara or as his imitation. Following is the verse mentions in *Kalikapurana*,

“*Smasan Herukakhyam raraktavarnam bhayankaram/asicarmadharam
raudram bhunjanam manujamisam Tisrbhir mundamalabhir galadrakabhi
rajitam Agninirdagdhavigaladdantapretoparithitam// pujyec cintanenaiva
Satravahanabhusanam//*”²²²

(There is a cemetery called Heruka, ferocious and red in color. He carries a sword and human skin, angry, devouring human flesh. Festooned with three garlands of heads, all oozing blood from their severed necks, he stands on a ghostlike corpse, its teeth falling out from the cremation fire. Ornamented with weapons and his vehicle; let him be worshiped only with your mind).

The site of the cremation ground as specifies in *Kalikapurana* is identifies by scholar the place with two hundred meters east of the current location of the main temple where Kamakhya was located. The cremation ground is now called Masan-Bhairi (Smasana-Bhairava), and a small temple there is dedicated to the ferocious divinity of the site.²²³ The idol sculptured in the stone face, on the north of the presently non-existing of Heruka (at present it is called *Bhairabi mandir*),²²⁴ there is

²¹⁹ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 202.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-213.

²²¹ *Kalikapurana* Chapter, 76, verse 88-90 as cited in Biswanarayan Sastri(ed), *Kalikapurana Murtivinirdesh*, op.cit., p. 81.

²²² *Kalikapurana*, 63.135–137, referred in Pitambara, Siddhantavagisha, *Tirtha Kaumudi*, Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), Anundoram Barua Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Assam, 1998, p. 270. (N.B.Pitambara was court pandit of Naranarayana (1540-1584C.E.) who quotes *Kalikapurana* and *Yogini Tantra* in compiling his work).

²²³ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 213.

²²⁴ The temple of Bhairabi was earlier known as temple of Heruka. For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 92.

depicted a 'hybrid' deity which represents Kala *Bhairava*, a mixture of Hindu Mahakala Bhairava and Boudha Heruka. Thus, Heruka was portrayed as a local demon, like a ghost or the divinity of a cremation ground and Buddhism appropriated with local deities of Assam.²²⁵ In succeeding period, Heruka also assumed the form of Vasudeva who was worshipped by ten-syllable *mantra*.²²⁶

The word *Tathagatakaritaditya* that found in the Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapala (c1058 C.E.),²²⁷ is interpreted by the scholar²²⁸ as the amalgamation between the Saivism and Buddhism. Tryambakananda introduced *adayatyavada* (monism) of Saiva philosophy and from the days of Sangamaditya, this philosophy spread in Kashmir. Tryambakaditya or his disciples end their names as *Aditya*. One who attains the *siddhi*, through the Buddhist practice is known as *Tthagata*. Thus, the mention of *Tthagatakaritaditya* in the Gauhati copper plate grant of Indrapala (c1058C.E.) is also the reflection of the amalgamation between the Saivism and Buddhist Tantricism.²²⁹

The Saiva movement powerfully advanced in the days of Sankara (788C.E.-850 C.E.) and the struggle between Buddhism and Saivism was at its height in south India in the seventh century.²³⁰ However, the above discussion shows that in Assam, there is peaceful adaptation of the two faiths. *Tantricism* was great synthesizing force and the synthesis between Saivism and Buddhism best reflected in the Natha sect which developed by Buddhist Siddhas. The discussion will be taking place in this chapter. It is not only syncretism between Buddhism with Saivism or Sakism but also the syncretism between Vaishnavism and Buddhism in Assam.

Syncretism with Vishnu:

Vaisnavism was the main agent of Brahmanical appropriation of Buddhism. *Avatarvada* (evolved form) of Vishnu played a dominant role to incorporate various

²²⁵ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 213 -214.

²²⁶ *YoginiTantra* mentions '*Herukang Dvadeshvarnena Basudeva rupinang*' SurenBhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati, 1994, p. 483.

²²⁷ Guwahati copper plate grant of Indrapala (c1058) mentions "*Uttarena Tthagatakaritaditya bhattaraka Satkasasanabhabisabhusimni khetralisthasakhotakbrisha...*" M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 184 & 191-192.

²²⁸ Acarya Manoranjan Sastri, 'Dharma aru Darshan', Giridhar Sarma (ed.), *Asomiya Jatir Itibritta*, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, second edition, 1996, p. 116.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

²³⁰ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, op.cit., p. 250.

popular deities that prevailed in India.²³¹ The syncretism leading to Vishnu in the region found in the iconography at Sukreswar (Guwahati) that is popularly known as Buddha- Janardana and a statue is found at Numaligarh representing the similar development. The statue seated in a manner of yogic posture cross-legged in a lotus, having four hands holding *sankha*, *gada*, *padma* (three of the four belongings of Vishnu, according to Hindu beliefs) in three hands respectively. Though believes, the fourth hand of the statue holds *chakra*, but it is broken now. It is also supposed the two lower hands of the statue are in *Bhumisparsamudra* (earth-touching motive, that of meditational practice of Buddhism), thus the statue represents the amalgam of the concept of Buddha and Vishnu.²³² *Yoginitantra*, the Brahmanical literature about sixteenth century refers that *Janardana* is to be worshipped as Buddha at Sukreswar.²³³ One of the important examples of the synthesis of Buddhism and Vaisnavism is the statue that is found at Numaligarh. The image has four hands and it is seated in *rajilila mudra*. His upper two hands carried ‘*Sankha*’ and ‘*Gada*’ while his lower two hands are in ‘*upadesa mudra*’ and carries a rosary, which is unusual for representation of god Vishnu. It is definitely the combination of Vishnu and *Avalokiteswara* in one form.²³⁴ This syncretism with Vishnu and Buddhist tantricism is reflected on the cult Hayagriva that is worshipped at Hajo, situated at 20 kilometer from Gauhati on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Devotees of both religious faiths Hindu and Buddhist regard the place of Hayagriva as a holy spot and visit the site. Among the Tibetan Buddhists, Hayagriva occupies a high place of honour, which they called as ‘*Rta-mgrin*’ and pronounced as ‘*Tam Din*’.²³⁵

²³¹ Bobby Das, ‘*Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study*,’ *PNEIHA*, thirty first Session, 2010, pp. 47-51.

²³² H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, vol-1, *op.cit.*, p. 392.

²³³ ‘*Janardanacha Devesam Kalau Baudhaswarupin*’ Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, *op.cit.*, p. 374.

²³⁴ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. 395.

²³⁵ L. A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 62, 164, 364 & 529.

Hajo, the place of worship of *Hayagriva* in Assam, associated with Buddhist tantricism is much earlier to *Kalikapurana*.²³⁶ Padmasambhava, who propagated Lamaism, traversed most of the places situated between lower Assam and Tibet.²³⁷ With the growing influence of neo-Brahmanical trends, *Kalikapurana* illustrated Hayagriva as the incarnation of Vishnu connecting with pan Indian literature.²³⁸ However, the same literature also portrays Hayagriva as a demon.²³⁹ In another place of *KalikaPurana*, Hayagriva is also present as the commander and doorkeeper of Naraka and when Krishna led an invasion against Naraka, Hayagriva was killed by Krishna.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study,' *op.cit.*, pp. 47-51.

²³⁷ L. A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

N.B. Lamaism based mainly on the rigorous intellectual disciplines of *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara* philosophy utilizes the symbolic ritual practices of Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism). *The new Encyclopaedia*, vol.2, 15th edition, 2007, p. 756.

²³⁸ According to Hindu belief, *Hayagriva* is a deity with the head of horse and an incarnation of Vishnu that had been mentioning from the time of Mahabharata onwards. Gradually, the story developed in variously refers in Puranas, viz. *Matsya Purana*, *Skanda*, *Markandeya*. as referred in Banikanta Kakati, *Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p. 68; Jogendra chandra Gosh, Haygriva worship In Assam, *J.AR.S.*, vol. II, no.4, 1935, pp. 79-80.

²³⁹ Following are the lines referred in the chapter 78 of *Kalikapurana*.

'On the south of Varnasa there is a lake called Lauhitya, and in the east there is a hill Manikuta, where the god Hayagriva resides. The lord Visnu assuming the form of Hayagriva killed the demon Jara (Jarasura) and also killed the demon Hayagriva' Here Jarasura and Haygriva are mentioned as fever and respectively. Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, Chokambha Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, 1972, p. 1167.

²⁴⁰ Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Barua (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, chapter 42, *op.cit.*, pp. 135-139; Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study', *op.cit.*, p. 51.

In subsequent period, Hayagriva of Assam became an incarnation of Vishnu²⁴¹ but an ally with Madhava.²⁴² However, Hayagriva retains its tantric mode of worship.²⁴³ The work of 16th century, i.e. *Yogini Tantra* has prescribed meat of buffalo, fish among various offerings in worshipping Hayagriva like a tantric deity which are unusual items of offering to the Vishnu.²⁴⁴

The non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas further contributed to this assimilation between Hinduism and Buddhism. Siddhas are of outside the formal institutions of religious authority and had wide contact with different religious groups (Saiva Kapalika, Sakta, etc.) and they represented a wider spectrum of values.²⁴⁵ *Siddha* is a non-Buddhist designations and practices and the Buddhists appropriated this. Indian used the term “siddha” to specify a successful group of saints that is found among the followers of Jaina and Siva. In the Mandasor stone inscription, dated 474 C.E. siddhas are described as among those who worship the sun and, specifically, those who propose to obtain magical powers (*siddhyarthin*). Siddhas also mentioned in *Arthasastra*, However, Buddhist siddhas have both continuities and discontinuities with siddhas tradition.²⁴⁶ They introduced many non-Buddhist methods in the practices of Buddhism, exhibit non-Buddhist behaviours and contributed to the syncretism with Hinduism.²⁴⁷ It has already mentioned that

²⁴¹ Hayagriva is mentioned as one of the incarnation of Vishnu in 16th century, *Vaisnava literature in Assam*. Mahapurusa Sankardeva added ‘Hayagriva’ ‘Dhruva’ and Hari with other 21 incarnations mentions in Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev, Narayan Chandra Goswami, (ed.), *Bhagavat Purana Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha*, Students stores, Gowahati, second edition 2001, p. 9; Nabin Chandra Sarmah, *Purani Asomiya Sahityar Subas*, Bani Prakash, 1988, p. 207.

²⁴² Bobby Das, ‘*Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study*,’ *op.cit.*, p. 51.

N.B. In the Puspabhadra grant of Dharmapala (first half of 12th century) referred to a temple dedicated to Sri Madhusudana (l.18). Here the donee is also Madhusudana who is celebrated to have worshipped the lotus feet of Madhava. M.M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 264-265.

²⁴³ Tantric rituals influenced the Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva, who was worshipped with Tantric rituals eight syllables, twelve syllables and eighteen syllables mantras H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, p. 332; J.C Ghosh, ‘Hayagriva worship In Assam’, *op.cit.*, p. 48 ; for details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 38-40; Bobby Das, ‘*Hayagriva in Assam A Brief Study*’, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-51.

²⁴⁴ Suren Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, *op.cit.*, pp. 550-551;

Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, p. 40;

²⁴⁵ Ronald M.Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 173-184 & 234.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-174; G.W. Farrow and I. Menon *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra With the Commentary Yogaratnamala*, *op.cit.*, p. x.

Luipa attained the *mahamudrasiddhi* by studying the *Cakrasambhara* system. The rituals of *Cakrasambhara* apparently were composed outside of the mainstream Indian Buddhist monastic order and are associated with Saiva Hindu sources.²⁴⁸

In this regard the contribution of Siddha Minnatha who is the symbol of assimilation between Saiva tantra and Buddha tantra attached to the two schools such as Yogini Kaula and Nathism represents the syncretism between Hinduism and later Buddhist practices is very important.²⁴⁹ Minnatha attaches with the traditions among both Hindus and the Buddhists. Matsyendranatha or Minnatha figures neither in the Brahmanical nor in the Buddhist pantheon in India proper.²⁵⁰

Followers of Nathism regard Matsyendranatha as the first of the human exponents of the Natha cult or the originator of this sect.²⁵¹ In Nepalese and Tibetan traditions, Matsyendranatha is identified with Avalokiteswara.²⁵² Even at the present day the Buddhist of Nepal, hold annual procession in honour of the defied Matsyendranatha.²⁵³

Minnatha attaches with two schools such as Yoginikaula and Nathism, which represents the syncretism between Hinduism and later Buddhist practices.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁸ David Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: A Study and Annotated Translation*, American Institute of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007.

²⁴⁹ Matsendra alias Minnatha propagated *Yogini-Kaula*, Hatha and Natha practice. *Yogini Kaulas* doctrine is popular in Kamarupa. The followers of *Yogini Kaula* adopted many practices of the Sahajiya school of Buddhist tantra. Both the *Yogini Kaulas* and Buddhist Sahajiya tantrics had the same goal: to transcend duality by concentrating the mind. Swami Ishatmananda, 'Shakti Puja and Sri Ramakrishna', *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 115, no. 6, June 2010, p. 366; For details, see P.C.Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relation*, *op.cit.*, p. 243; P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, p. 223.

²⁵⁰ George Weston Briggs *Gorakhnath and Kanphata Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

²⁵¹ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 198; B. Bhattacharya, 'The Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 269.

²⁵² P.C. Bagchi, 'The Cult of the Buddhist Siddhacarya', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, pp. 282-383.

²⁵³ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 198; A. Barth, *The Religions of India*, London 1882, as referred, G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and Kanphata Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

²⁵⁴ Matsyendranath is considered as the propounder of the *Kaula* path. The followers of which are also called the *Yogini Kaulas* of Kamarupa. They worship Shakti alone and have adopted many practices of the Sahajiya school of tantra. Both the *Yogini Kaulas* and Buddhist Sahajiya tantrics had the same goal: to transcend duality by concentrating the mind. Swami Ishatmananda, 'Shakti Puja and Sri Ramakrishna', *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 115, no. 6, June 2010, p. 366.

Minantha introduced a new class of *kaula* that is known as Yoginikaula.²⁵⁵ *Kaula*, derives from the word *kula*, that means sakti.²⁵⁶

The Yoginikaula school of Matsyendranath is syncretic of the character, which advocates the philosophy like Sahajiya school of Buddhism.²⁵⁷ In the *Kaulajnananirnaya*, it reveals that there are something common in Yoginikaula and the Buddhist Tantras of Sahaja class.²⁵⁸ Similar to Buddhist sahajiya, the *Yoginikaula* disregards the traditional lore, discredits the outward purificatory rites, and denounces the attempt to attain salvation by the study of the *Satras* and by exoteric practices, such as sacrifices, fasting, bathing, visiting holy places etc.²⁵⁹ Thus, Yoginikaula is the fusion between Tantricism (containing the elements of Saktism) and Buddhist mysticism.²⁶⁰ Jayaratha in his commentary on the celebrated *Tantraloka* of Avinavagupta refers to the story of the origin of Kaulism. He mentions that *Kaulajnana* transmitted to Minnatha through Bhairava and his consort (Bhairabi) in the *Mahapitha* Kamarupa.²⁶¹ The doctrine *yoginikaula* became popular in Kamarupa and the work *Koulajnananirnaya* was available in every household of

²⁵⁵ There are number of Tantras belonging to the principal Brahmanical sects namely, Saiva Tantras, Vaisnava Tantras and Sakti Tantra. SanmohaTantra is a complete Saktic character assimilated a very large number of cults of various origins regional tribal, sectarian, and established a well-developed and complicated pantheon of goddess (all representing various asoects of Sakti). The *SanmohaTanta* mentioned three classes of Tantras or Sadhanas, *Divya*, *Kaula* and *Vama*. P.C.Bagchi. Evolution of Tantra, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, op.cit., pp. 219-223; B.K Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 187.

²⁵⁶ Kula stands for Sakti and so, Kaula schools is Saktic in character. Kula is gross (*sthula*), subtle (*sukhma*) and ulterior(*Para*), Senses (*Indriya*) and the five gross physical elements (*bhutadi*) and in the sense of cause and effects.Jaidev Sing (ed) *Abhinavagupta Para trisika – Vivarana* , The secret of Tantric mysticism, Motilal Banarsidas, fifth edition, 1988, p. 31; P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, op.cit., p. 223.

²⁵⁷ The fundamental doctrine of the Sahaja class is the ideal state of Yogin is a state in which the minds enter the vacucty becomes free from duality and rejects the illusiory character of the world. The yogini kaula advocates the doctrine of Sahaja. It defines Sahaja almost in the terms of the Buddhist mystics as a state in which the mind attains immobility becomes free from duality and illusion'. P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, op.cit., p. 223.

²⁵⁸ P.C. Bagchi, *Kaulajnananirnaya and Minor Texts of the School of Matsendranath* Introduction, p. 33. As reffered in P.C.Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, op.cit., p. 223.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam*, op.cit., pp. 187-188.

²⁶¹ *Bhairavya Bhairavat praptam yogam vyapya priya tatsakasattu Siddhena minakhyena varanane Kamarupe mahapithe Macchandena mahatmana* (*Tantraloka*, pp. 24, 25) as referred in B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, op.cit.,p.188; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 306; P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve-century A.D.*, op.cit., p. 426.

Kamarupa.²⁶² This religious community converted to Brahmanical religion in Kamarupa that has come to be known as Nathas.

Minnatha was also the symbol of assimilation between *Saiva tantra* and *Buddha tantra*. In the *Savara tantra*, Minnatha is included among the 24 Kapalika who flourished during the time of Ratnapala of Kamarupa.²⁶³ According to one myth illustrated in Buddhist work throws the light about the amalgamation of the dogma between Sahajayana and Saivism as the upadesha (teachings) from Siva inherited by Minnatha while Siva was giving lesson to Parvati.²⁶⁴ According to the myth, one day, a fish swallowed Mina, the fisher of Kamarupa, when he was in deep contemplation. While he was inside the fish, overheard the *upadesha* (teachings) given by Siva (Deveswara) to his wife Uma. He meditated over that *upadesha* and born later. He spent thirteen years in the belly of the fish, before that he had a son. Later, both father Mina and Matsyandra took initiation from Siddha Carpati.²⁶⁵

Nathism was a conglomeration of Saivism, Buddhism and Saktism, with Saivism as the pre-dominating factor.²⁶⁶ The Natha cult seems to be synchronous with the Buddhist Sahajiya cult, though however, the origin of the cult may be traced to much earlier date. It was essentially a Saiva Yogic School and developed most probably from the early Siddha cult of India.²⁶⁷ It is a crypto- Buddhist or an esoteric Buddhist cult, which later seceded from the Buddhist fold and transformed itself in to a Saivite cult.²⁶⁸

²⁶² The language of the work *Kaulajnananirnaya* corresponds to the old Kamarupi dialect and the work is attributed to Minnatha. P.C. Bagchi (ed.), *Koulajnananirnaya* Calcutta, 1934; B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), *op.cit.*, pp. 187-188; Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, *op.cit.*, appendix, p. 6.

²⁶³ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 306.

²⁶⁴ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

²⁶⁵ Bhupendranath Datta, (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, *op.cit.*, pp. 74-75.

²⁶⁶ For details, see D.Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *The Proceedings Of North East India History Association*, Dibrugarh, 2008, p. 109; R.M. Nath, 'Lui-Pada and Matsendranatha', *op.cit.*, p. 53; P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantras', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, *op. cit.*, p. 223

²⁶⁷ S.B. Dasgupta, 'Some later Yogic Cult', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 297.

²⁶⁸ Gorakhnatha, Matsyendra natha's disciple, who was regarded as renegade in Tibet, introduced a new type of meditation and tried to give the religious sect a Brahmanical character. P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 426; D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, p. 108; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.v, p. 269; S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 192.

The followers of Nathism regard Minnatha or Matsendranatha as the originator of Natha sect.²⁶⁹ The Nathas were originally nine in number and they are sometimes included in the list of eighty-four Buddhists Siddhas. Minanath, Goraksanath, Jalandhari and Cauranginath who are the most prominent among the Nathas were all included in the list of the Buddhist Siddhacaryas.²⁷⁰ It has been said that the name Natha has come from a religious sect, which derived its name from Gorakhnatha.²⁷¹ The original home of the is Natha cult is believed in north and north-east Bengal, from this region, it spread out to the other parts of the country sometime after twelfth or the thirteenth century.²⁷² The development of Nathism is resulted by the reforms of Gorakhnatha that took place outside Assam. There is no evidence to show that existed in the society of Brahmaputra valley called Natha till the time of the British. The term borrowed from Bengal where Gorakhnatha's religious cults has left a mark.²⁷³

Yogi or *Katani* was the indigenous community who lived in valley of Brahmaputra. It was during the period of Pala rulers of Kamarupa, the *Yogi* community formed as a religious community of crypto-Buddhist faith.²⁷⁴ While in Bengal and other places, the Buddhist Sahajayana cult converted to Nathism, in Assam the Buddhist Sahajayana became directly Brahmanised or Vaisnavised parallel.²⁷⁵ In Assam, the *Yoginikaula* sect converted to Brahmanical. Thus, the nature of the development of this sectarian Buddhism and the process of syncretism in the region is not similar than other parts of India. In course of time the after coming Natha, from other side of Assam, this sect assimilated with Nathas.²⁷⁶

The above discussion shows that when Mahayana had not developed into a fully independent institution, a section of the follower of Buddhism entered

²⁶⁹ P.C. Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantra,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 223.

²⁷⁰ B. Bhattacharya, 'The Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, p. 269; S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 200.

²⁷¹ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, p. 108.

²⁷² Sukumar Sen, 'The Natha Cult', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 280.

²⁷³ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, pp. 114-115.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-117.

Assam.²⁷⁷ Initially, the propounders of Mahayana without having institutional support constructed the stupas as the beginning of their activities.²⁷⁸ Buddhists after coming to the region, involved with stupa worship or mantra practices, the practices that connect with meditation of Mahayana Buddhism. They performed their rites in the religious places such as Suryapahar and Nilachala the places, which already developed as the sacred place of the non-Aryan or Alpine inhabitant. Buddhist of the region appropriated and adapted with the local cult and developed tantric practices.

Early Kamarupa was surrounded by the areas where there is the evidence of the existence of both Thervada and Mahayana forms of Buddhism. In the records of Chinese travelers, the referenes to the popularity of Buddhism in Tamralipta and Karnasuvarna are found.²⁷⁹ The Buddhists of the area of Pundravardhana, which was included as a part of early Assam, were follower of both Theravada and Mahayana schools.²⁸⁰

In Assam in the early period Buddhist Mahayana traits penetrated through western boundary²⁸¹ While the Hinayana tradition came with the migration of the tribes such as Khamtis and Singphos from Burma.²⁸² The esoteric practices of Buddhism were developed in early period with their association with its dominated indigenous practices, along with the importation of some ideas of Bon religion from Tibet.

The Mahayana Buddhism most likely began as ‘an underground’²⁸³ and in initial stage Mantrayana was performed secretly. That is why Hieun Tsang who visited Assam in 7th century stated regarding the prevalence of Buddhism in

²⁷⁷ Scholar opines that Mahayana form of Buddhism penetrated Assam from its western boundary in the early Chriatian era. Nishipad Dev Choudhary, ‘The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,’ *op.cit.*, p. 206.

²⁷⁸ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

²⁷⁹ Fahien who visited India in last decades of 4th century and stayed two years in Tamralipti found not less than twenty-two Buddhist Viharas and a large number of sculptures and paintings of Buddha in Tamralipta alone. Thomas waters (tr.), *On Yuan –Chwang’s Travels in India*, London, 1904-05 reprint 1973 New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, pp. 185-192.

²⁸⁰ Shaman Hwui Li, Samuel Beal (ed.), *The Life of Hiuen Tsang*, London, 1884; 1st enlarged Indian edition 1973, Academia Asiatica, Delhi, p. 131.

²⁸¹ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, ‘The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam’, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

Kamarupa in following words 'The law of Buddha has not widely extended' and 'whatever Buddhists there were in it (Kamarupa), performed their acts of devotion secretly.'²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, after hundreds years of secrecy, Kamarupa became a prominent center of Vajrayana. Gradually, all the branches of esoteric practices of Buddhism, such as Vajrayana, Sahajayana and Kalacakrayana tantricism were expressive in early Assam.

All these sectarian tenets of esoteric forms of Buddhism in Assam were running side by side with the Puranic form of Hinduism. Gradually, both the religious practices came nearer to each other.²⁸⁵ In course of time, these forms of Buddhism in Assam syncretised with three major branches of Hinduism, namely, Sakticism, Saivism and Vaisnavism. With the ascendency of neo-Brahmanical trends, these practices were blended with Hinduised practices.

It has been said 'Where different ethnic and religious groups share the same cultural space over a long period of time they are obliged to learn the ways of mutual accommodation.'²⁸⁶ In Assam, there is no mention of any sectarian conflict rather evidence of peaceful assimilation of two religious faiths are there. Buddhist, deity Heruka was not portrayed either as a superior or inferior one. Heruka and Vajravarahi, are not portrayed as trampling upon the supine Hindu deities Bhairava and Kalaratri. *Kalikapurana* depicted Heruka was born from Siva and portrayed in the manner of a cemetery divinity.

The assimilation between Vishnu and Buddhist tantricism is also reflected in the cult Hayagriva that is worshipped at Hajo.²⁸⁷ Though at some places in

²⁸⁴ T Watters (ed.), T.W. Rhys Davids & S.W. Bushell (eds.), *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India*, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1904, vol.II, p. 165. Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki* (trans.), *Buddhist Records of the Western World* London 1906, vol.ii, p. 195f. as referred in P.C. Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 295.

²⁸⁵ Kunal Chakrabarti views, "in popular understanding Buddhist and Brahmanical icons came to perform the same function. Even in the realm of underlying metaphysical premises tantricism brought the Buddhist and brahmanical ways of worship close. When both the religions began to receive royal patronage irrespective of the personal faiths of the rulers it carried the universal message that the differences between them, if any, were marginal and that both were entitled to be venerated in almost equal manner." Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious process: Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, p. 142.

²⁸⁶ D.P. Chattopadhyaya, 'In search of the Roots of Religion of Dharama', Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007, p. 11.

²⁸⁷ Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam: A Brief Study', op.cit., pp. 47-51.

Kalikapurana Buddhist Hayagriva is portrayed by the literate Brahmana as demon²⁸⁸ but in the sculptures the Vishnu and Buddha enjoy equal status. Nonetheless, this syncretism is a good example of cohesion and assimilation between Buddhism and Hinduism.

Thus, we can say that there was no strong political and institutional support extended to Buddhism in early Kamarupa. However, some ritualistic practices that developed in forms of Mantryana, Vajrayana, Sahajayana and Kalacakrayana appropriated with Hinduism that occupy an important place in the socio-religious life of Assam prior to the 13th century.

²⁸⁸ Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), *Kalika purana*, chapter 78, Chokambha Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, 1972, p. 1167.

Chapter 4

Impact of Buddhism on the Social Life of Assam

In the previous chapter of this dissertation, we have discussed the expanse of Buddhism in Assam including the forms of its development. It has also focused upon the responses of Buddhism to different socio-economic changes. In this chapter, we are going to discuss the influence of Buddhism on the social life of Assam.

Society and religion, which are part and parcel to each other, plays an important role in society. Religion is psychological need of the society that is created by socio-economic forces.¹ It is the sum total of belief, faith, value and behavior, i.e. among the various aspects of social psychology², that represents collective social value.³ Religion can be study in two aspects, philosophy and rites and ritual practices. Some aspects of individual behaviour⁴ such as morality, law and ethics associates with religion and that determine the social behaviour. Thus, religion determines the relationship of individual and group and that project the

¹The religious dimension of a society evolved through a process that is a contribution of various factors and cultural groups under various politico-economic systems in different periods of history. The changing features of social and economic life, such as, growth of towns, expansion of the artisan class, and the rapid development of trade and commerce were closely linked to changes of religion and philosophical speculation. For details, see Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1979, p. 63.

² It has been said that 'It is not the consciousnesses of men that determine their social being, but on the contrary their social existence that determines their consciousness.' Max Weber emphasized social existence conditions the nature of religions (because human consciousness always in the background of material reality) but religions also condition society (because they affect human action which in turn changes societies). Karl Marx, Preface, *Critique of Political Economy*, as referred in Barun De, 'Religion and Material Life in Ancient India: D.D. Kosambi and Niharranjan Ray', Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007, p. 129; H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (eds. and trans.), *From Max Weber*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1958, p. 280; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, Sage Publications, 2003, p. 145.

³Religious beliefs provide a basis for people to unite to form integrated groups. If a society has a religion to which all or most of its members adhere, the religion will play a very important part in holding individuals to each other. *The New Encyclopedia*, vol.ii, 15th edition, 2007, p. 602.

⁴'When a religion suits a particular form of social order, it also helps to sustain and reinforce it' Accordingly religion also 'makes man.' As cited in Irfan Habib (ed.), 'Introduction', *Religion in Indian History*, op.cit., p. xiii.

dimension of society to some extent.⁵ Max Weber and Emile Durkheim concerned how individuals and groups identify themselves in the world not only in relation to each other but to the social, cultural and natural conditions of their existence as well.⁶ Integrating Weber with Durkheim, Parsons derived a framework for analyzing relationships between religion and normative structures of societies. He is of the opinion that religious beliefs provide principles for moral communities, while religious rituals promote commitment to the principles. In long-term perspective, religious ethics establish moral impetus and direction for rationalizing societal institutions.⁷ 'Durkheim's ideology on the sociology of religion were important in the analysis of Indian society since religion was often regarded as the crucial variable which gave a particular direction to Indian society, a point of view more fully elaborated by Weber.'⁸

It is in this background of theoretical discussion on religion and society now we try to analyse the social impact on Buddhism in Assam. It is said that Buddhism developed as a philosophical system aiming to keep up individual peace of mind and happiness of all living beings that connects the objective of the happiness of human society.⁹ According to Buddhism, the meditative and contemplative practices are

⁵ Society means the totality of social facts projected on to the dimension of relationship and groupings; culture is same totality in the dimension of action. Social organization is the technical anthropological term for the basic aspect of human group life that comprises the institutions in which all other behavior, both social and individual is set. Religious ideas lead to the formation of certain groups, such as monastic orders, guilds of magicians, or a clergy and these groups. For details, see S.F. Nadel, *The Foundation of Social Anthropology*, London, 1951, pp. 79-80; Mevill J. Herskovits *Cultural Anthropology*, Oxford & IBH Publishing co. 1955, first Indian edition, 1969, New Delhi, p. 316.

⁶Max Weber tries to establish links between specific social stratum distinctions and modes of religious expression. Durkheim concentrated upon general social significance of religious experience and belief. For details, see William Ramp, 'Durkheim and After Religion, Culture, and Politics' in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Sociology of Religion*, John Wiley & Sons West Sussex, United Kingdom, second edition 2010, pp. 52-75.

⁷ Victor Lidz, 'The Functional Theory of Religion' in S.Turner (ed.), *The Sociology of Religion*, op.cit., pp. 76-79; Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1937, p. 568.

⁸ As quoted in Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1992, pp. 34-35.

⁹ For details, see A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1971, p. 157; N.B. Asoka undertook the social welfare programs after his personal transformation.

only basis for a moral development.¹⁰ In the words of Gail Omvedt, 'Buddhism concerns for individual renunciation from passion and helped in the creation of a vibrant, open commercially developing society exchanging ideas and goods with the rest of the world.'¹¹ Buddhism emerged as an ideology to serve the new age of urbanism. G. Upreti emphasized the role of early Buddhism in creating an ethics appropriate to an individualistic (market oriented) society, including the nuclear family and private property oriented commercialization.¹²

In this Buddhological historiography, scholars generally assess the importance of the role of Sangha, monastery¹³ along with ethical principles of early Buddhism without offering much analysis of Mahayana and Vajrayana and the non-institutional Buddhist Siddha¹⁴ traditions, which had taken a form somewhat different from its earlier tradition.¹⁵ It has been suggested by scholars that by the 7th century C.E. the major civilizing function of Buddhism has ended and early medieval monasteries consumed agrarian resources without providing anything in return. Buddhism was to them always a great financial burden on both the state and society as it depended on state support and patronage of the rich for its existence from the very beginning. The Buddhist monasteries were huge establishments and monks lived on large-scale government and public charities.¹⁶

¹⁰ Rita M. Gross 'Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethics', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 65/2, p. 347.

¹¹ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, op.cit., p. 148.

¹² G.B. Upreti, *The Early Buddhist Outlook in Historical Perspective*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1997, p. 143.

¹³ Scholar advocated dynamic pattern of monastic interactions with the society and economy in early historic period (c. B.C.E. 300- 300 C.E.). H.P. Ray in her work emphasized the role of the monasteries as catalytic factors in facilitating the transition from Tribal Chiefdoms to institutional state in Deccan. For details, see H.P. Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas*, Delhi, 1986, p. 207.

¹⁴ The distinction between institutional and non-institutional esoterism is that, the former based on decisions predominantly made within the monastic community and the latter the product of the Buddhist siddha culture. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 76.

¹⁵ Buddhism is socially developed religion and related to the contemporary social reality and it was undergoing distinct changes during the succeeding periods. For details, see Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 2006, p. vii.

¹⁶ For details study see D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 96-106; *idem.*, *Urban Decay*, Delhi, 1987, p. 131; S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerat, 1987, p. 377.

On the other hand, Ronald M. Davidson sees the values of esoteric Buddhism in social context. In his words:

‘Esoteric Buddhism was generated by groups that were constituted in a variety of discrete social levels and tended to define the esoteric system based on the relationship between the needs of the institution or small group and the models of authority developed in the society at large. In this regard, Buddhist monasteries evolved regional institutional cultures, analogous to the specific cultures seen in large corporations or educational institutions in the modern period. Individuals became socialized into these cultures and began to reflect the values developed by the consensus and history of the institution.’¹⁷

Mahayana and Vajrayana, who responded to the socio-economic reality,¹⁸ received new mode of expression in the passage of time. Some rites and rituals were formulated by the followers of different forms of Buddhism, which made its stand out in contrast to original Buddhism.¹⁹ After the seventh century, tantric form of Buddhism in India was performed in two ways 1. by the monks in the monastic institutions and 2. by the non-institutional individual Buddhist Siddhas.²⁰ The Siddhas played an important position in the lives of Buddhist and non-Buddhist social forms. The ritualistic practices of Vajrayana along with the non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha tradition influenced many aspects of the society of Assam.

In India, Brahmanism and Buddhism gave rise to two different forms of society. Brahmanical society was a caste hierarchical society, a society of privileges and of discrimination. ‘Purity’ and ‘impurity’ were essential concepts in the

¹⁷ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 116.

¹⁸ Buddhism was emerged as a body of thought responding to the challenges of the emerging urban backdrop and ideological sustenance of urban norms and values of 6th century B.C. For details, see Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism* op.cit., pp. viii, 7, 15 & 36.

¹⁹ ‘Early Buddhism enforced unnatural and strict rules of behavior and forbade all kinds of worldly enjoyments such as wine, woman, fish, meat and all kinds of exiting food, while the tantrics embodied all these in their practice in the form of the five makaras.’ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, Oxford University press, London 1938 reprint 2009 Delhi Motilal Banarsidas, pp. 278-279.

²⁰ For details, see Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 76.

Brahmanical society and the persons were considered as pure or impure according to their birth in a pure or impure caste which had nothing to do with moral values. These concepts were not found in Buddhist society. Buddhism never made compromise with its principle of equality,²¹ despite much of the original ethical teaching was submerged in ritual with development of tantricism.²²

In the words of Gail Omvedt:

‘Tantric practices can be taken as a revolt against caste, a rejection of the purity–pollution hierarchy which produced untouchability at the bottom and the supreme purity of Brahmins at the top. The ‘shock value’ produced by its practices and rituals may well have been salutary for those socialised into the values of Brahmanism. Tantric practitioners were often low caste or identified themselves with low castes; the habits of the wandering *siddhas* (‘perfected ones’) of having low-caste consorts illustrates this (though it can also raise questions of gender exploitation)’.²³

From the discussion in the chapter 2 of this dissertation, it is clear, that Buddhism was introduced in the land before the shaping of the Brahmanical norms in the society.²⁴ There is neither any authentic evidence of the existence of any monastery nor *mahaviharas* that led to the firm institutionalisation of Buddhism as a

²¹Buddhism is a religion of common man irrespective of caste and social status. Buddhism propagated equality of man and opened the doors to higher religious life, highest goal for all those who sought them, contrary to Brahmanical social order that based on *Varna* system. Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, p. 168; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, pp. 76-77.

²² Romila Thapar, *A History of Ancient India, A History of India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1966, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

²³ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

²⁴For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol.1, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1990, p. 306; Nishipad Dev Chodhary, ‘The antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,’ *J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxix, no. 82, 2004-2006, pp. 201-216 .

religion in early Assam, at least the period of Samudrapala.²⁵

There is dearth of source materials that provide the information about the Buddhist communities or the nature of its impact in the society of early Assam. In the early period, a section of the follower of Buddhism constructed the stupas near Garo hill along with Surya Pahar area that is located in Goalpara district of Assam. Though it has been supposed that the group received support from traders and mercantile community,²⁶ the pilgrims of surrounding areas generally offered gold, silver, flowers incense, and food at *stupas*.²⁷ The dominant group of Goalpara was Rajbansi that originated from the aboriginal tribes such as the Mech, Rabha and Kachari.²⁸ However, it is not understandable how far the people of surrounding areas were influenced by those practices.

Buddhist associated with the indigenous predominant non-Aryan people of the region. The myth recorded in the *Kalikapurana* focuses the alliance between Siva as leader with the followers of Buddhism against the *Dvija* or twice born Brahmana. According to myth, after following some incident, Siva instructed his *ganas* (i.e. devotees) and goddess Ugratara (i.e. her devotees) to drive away the

²⁵Scholars believe the mention of Satra institution at Yogahati in the Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala (dated 1154 Saka, i.e. 1232 C.E), means monastery of the Buddhist Bhiksus where the esoteric Sadhanas were performed.

It has mentioned in the Inscription “*Adityasama Srisamudrapalarajye PrabalaSabasikasatra Sagunkriya Sanyasin bule Danapunya Saja Yogihati Sak ish yanachakra murha vanati*”

For details, see Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamarupasasanavali*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1981, p. 159; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, p. 306.

²⁶ In early India, many stupas and monasteries received support mainly from the mercantile community. For details, see D.D. Kosambi, *An introduction to the study of Indian History*, 2nd edition, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1975, pp. 182-185; R. Thapar, *A History of India*, vol.1, Penguin, NewDelhi, 1966, p. 68; D.N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar Publisher, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 138-139.

²⁷ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 273-274.

²⁸Birendranath Datta, *A Folk Culture of the Goalpara Region* of Assam, University Publication Department, Guwahati University, 1994, p. 10.

people along with Brahmins (*Caturvarnaadvijatisu*) from Kamarupa.²⁹ The followers of Ugratara mentioned in *Kalikapurana*, undoubtedly represent the followers of Buddhism.³⁰ It may be presumed that myth as a conflict between established orthodoxy and the newly coming up group³¹ occurred on the question of supremacy over the area of worship. Of course, there is no any source to supports the sectarian conflict that had occurred during this legendary period, except this myth.

Politically, the semi-historical period was followed by the rule of Varman dynasty.³² This was a time of the development of Hindu culture and during this period, Buddhist performed their esoteric practices secretly.³³ Thus, naturally the political patronage of Brahmanical culture was more influential in the society than the small section of Buddhist. Nevertheless, this esoteric secret form of Buddhism could not touch the society as a whole. During the reign of the early rulers of Salastambha dynasty, Kamarupa became one of the leading centers of tantric

²⁹ It is mentioned in chapter 82 *Kalikapurana*, ‘When all the people living in Kamarupa , on account of holiness of the region attained salvation defying the control of the god Yama, Brahama and Vishnu requested Hara (Siva) to stop it. Hara deputed his gana led by Ugratara. The evicted all the people, the followers of the Vedic path and in the process they caught the sage Vasistha too.” Thus a clash occurred between Siva and his ally Ugratara with Vasistha along with other twice born (*Dvija*). Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), *Kalikapurana Murtivinirdesha*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, pp. xxv-xxvii; Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Barua (ed.), *Kalikapurana*, Dutta Barua Publishing Company, Guwahati, 2007, ch. 81, p. 300.

³⁰ Buddhist goddess Tara, entered in to Hindu fold as Ugra –Tara. Biswanarayan Sastri in ‘Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam, *Journal of Assam Research Society*, xxxii, p. 4; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004, p. 19.

³¹ Naraka, the ruler of Kamarupa, contemporary of Vasistha, is said to have settled the twice –born (*Dvija* or Brahmanas) people in early Kamarupa, near the capital as he had driven the Kiratas as a part of his policy or as instruction given by Vishnu; K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, second edition, 1960, pp. 18-19. For details, see B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 6 & 28-34; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.i, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

³² After the fall of Gupta rule, Varmana rulers initiated the expansion and performed Hindu ritual i.e., Aswamedha sacrifices. It became the systematic policy of the rulers to create *agrahara* settlements for the Brahmanas and this royal policy was largely responsible for the evolution of Dharma.

³³ M. Neog, ‘Buddhism in Kamarupa,’ *I.H.Q.*, vol. xxvii, no.2, 1951, p. 144; Hieun Tsang who visited Assam in the 7th century, stated regarding the prevalence of Buddhism in Kamarupa in following words, ‘The law of Buddha has not widely extended’ and ‘ whatever Buddhists there were in it (Kamarupa), performed their acts of devotion secretly. T. Watters, T.W. Rhys Davids & S.W. Bushell (ed.), *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India*, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1904, vol.II, p. 165; Samuel Beal, ‘*Si-yu-ki*’ *Buddhist Records of the Western world*(trans.), London, 1906, vol.II, p. 195

Buddhism i.e. *Vajrayana*.³⁴ The region gradually became an area of interaction of Buddhists from different land. The tantric Buddhist practices that developed out with the association with non-Brahmanical practices generally appealed to them.

In the early period, the small section of Buddhist group and the secret esoteric practitioners could not influence the society. In subsequent periods, the esoteric practices performed by the Buddhists were no longer secret and Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha spread their doctrine that could influence many aspects of the society of early Assam.

After early Salastambha rulers due to the demands and pressures of an expanding agrarian order, the rulers of Kamarupa followed the Hindu ideology and promoted *varna* system.³⁵ This political ascendancy of Hinduism led to a remarkable change in the socio-religious pattern in Kamarupa. With the political patronage of *Varnasramadharma*, the early agriculturist society of Kamarupa was transforming to a caste-based society. Accordingly, numerous Mongoloid tribes converted to Hinduism and were accorded consequently, to Sudra status.³⁶ Though in Assam, there was considerable flexibility of rigidity of caste rites compared with northern India,³⁷ some people or the social class that emerged with this process of Aryanisation did not satisfy with this stratification.

In the Tantric form of Buddhism (*Vajrayana* to *Sahajayana*) there is no place of caste distinction and caste superiority of *Varna* based *Brahmanical* social order. Tantric methods broke the compatible conventional social views, the taboos, restriction of caste rites etc. and slackened many restrictions developed by

³⁴ *Sadhanamala*, ii, pp. 453-455 as referred in H.K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, pp. 339-340; D.C Sircar, 'Sakta Pithas', *J.R.A S.B.*, vol. xiv, no. I, 1948, p. 12.

³⁵ In Guwahati Grant Inscription of Indrapala, the word *Samayavibhakta-caturvarnasramadhara* clearly mentioned about the society of Kamarupa was distinctly divided in to four classes and stages of people. M.M. Sarma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 183 & 187.

³⁶ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 208; It has been suggested that the process of Aryanisation or Sanskritisation nearly completed in the valley of the Brahmaputra by 1200 C.E. For details, see S.K. Chatterje, *The place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Department of Publication, G.U, 1955, p. 35.

³⁷ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *ibid.*, p. 207. It is due to the inter-mixture with Alpines and even higher classes of Aryan stock, the Brahmins of Assam did not take the strictly orthodox habits with regard to dietary practices and they followed a flexible code of social conduct. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

Brahmanical social system.³⁸ As these forms of Buddhism gave equal opportunities to different segments of society at the religious and spiritual level, which had been denied to them by orthodox Brahmanism, thus, Vajrayana got wide publicity mainly outside the *Varnasramadharma*³⁹ and appealed to the common people, and the despised castes.⁴⁰ It has been said that Mlecchas or the Kiratas, easily accepted Buddhism.⁴¹

It is found mentioned in the *Brihaddharma Purana* that tantric Buddhism, Tantric Saivism and Tantric Saktism had made the position of *Varnasramadharma* critical in Bengal and adjoining regions.⁴² In early Assam one professional class, Doms or the Kaivartas, enjoyed their sound socio-economic status⁴³ but in the framework of Brahmanical social system, they were of low-grade. It was due to the financial prosperity, this section of people fostered the desire to have higher or equal position with that section of people, who assumed the higher position by birth. As

³⁸ G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra With the Commentary Yogaratnamala*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, reprint, 2001, p. xiv.

³⁹ Taranatha says, "When the Tantras were handed down from Guru to disciples secretly for nearly three hundred years, they got publicity through the mystic teachings, songs and miracles of the Siddhas, Nathas and Yogis". Binoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhists', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. iv, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, second edition 1956, p. 263, Surendra, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati, 1994, p. 172.

⁴⁰ 'Buddhist religion was a reformed religion of Hindu cult but it was established for the common and low caste people who could not afford to spend money to engage a middleman (*purohita*) to worship or sacrifice according to the rites of the Vedas and the Brahmanical Sastras, as referred in R. S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 138; D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata, A study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 331-332.

⁴¹ Bharati Barua, 'Secular Approach by the Ancient Kings of Pragjyotish: A Study', *J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxxvi, nos. 1 & 2, 1997, published in 2003, p. 25.

N.B. The earliest inhabitants of Assam were predominantly Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid trait who were known as Kiratas and Cinas and commonly designated as *Mlecchas* and *Asuras*. Thus, the Aryan people used the term *Mleccha* in their literature to mean non-Aryan and non-Hindu Mongoloid people of the region.

For details, see K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 2; B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, Bina library, Guwahati, fourth edition 2003, p. 5; P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, third edition (revised) 1987, p. 191.

⁴² Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Making of early Medieval India*, Oxford University press, Delhi, 1994, p. 31.

⁴³ About 9th century, they Dom (identical as the sub-branch of Kaivartyas) constitute a powerful group in the society B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 130; M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Department of Publication, G.U. Assam, 1978, pp. 81-83.

their social mobility was thwarted by taboos in the *Varna* based Brahmanical social system, the professional class Dom embraced Buddhism.⁴⁴ Another indigenous community who lived in Brahmaputra valley is known as *Yogi* or *Katani*.⁴⁵ Originally, they were associated with different profession like drum beating, palanquin bearing, quackery and snake charming etc.⁴⁶ It was during the period of Pala rulers of Kamarupa, the *Yogi* community was formed as a religious community of crypto-Buddhist faith and in course of time, they are known as Nathas.⁴⁷

The Siddha tradition might not have concerned with any social rule and in many ways it seemed to reflect the 'homeless' life of early Buddhism.⁴⁸ They played an important position in the lives of Buddhist and non-Buddhist social forms.⁴⁹ The Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha tradition could form some social groups on a variety of separate social levels generating esoteric Buddhism.

Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas interacted with outcaste, tribal people and by attracting the followers from all social classes could organise certain sects.⁵⁰ This religious and philosophic movement of the sahajiya Buddhist tradition generally associated with the lowest castes and professional group.⁵¹ The songs of Sahajiya Siddhas attached with the characters as the *Candali*, *Dombi*, *Rajaki*, *Savari* and the

⁴⁴ Gunabhiram Barua says that Buddhist rites and rituals are performed by Dom until neo-Vaisnavite movement. Though, they were included in Hindu fold, after reforms led by neo-Vaisnavite saints Sankardeva and Madhavdeva but they were looked down upon in Hindu society due to their previous adherence to Buddhism. For details, see Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parisad, Guwahati, 1972, pp.142- 143.

⁴⁵ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction' *P.N.E.I.H.A., Association*, Dibrugarh, 2008, p.110.

⁴⁶ During the period of Ahom rule, they were mainly associated with the rearing of pat silk worms and spinning of silk thread and they now became agriculturist people S.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Monoharlal, New Delhi, third edition, 2003, p. 16.

⁴⁷ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op. cit.*, pp. 110-120.

⁴⁸ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

⁴⁹ The Siddha ideology derived from local, tribal, and outcaste groups existing in a fluid state outside the formal institutions of religious authority. Ronald.M.Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp.114-116 &170-171.

⁵⁰ For details, see Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, pp. 5 & 371.

⁵¹ In the *Carya Padas* of Sahajiya Siddhas, even the imageries and conception are centered on the lower classes. Sahajiya Siddhas brought in to focus of that section of the society, which was an unusual of medieval literature. The songs attached with the characters as the *Candali*, *Dombi*, *Rajaki*, *Savari* and the female names represent some of the lowest castes carrying on the most despised occupation. D. P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* Peoples Publishing House, 7th edition 1992, p. 330.

female names represent some of the lowest castes carrying on the most despised occupation.⁵² Large number out of the 84 Siddhas reportedly belonged to lower castes (about half of them being of the rank of Domba, Chamara, Chandala, washerman, oilman, tailor, fisherman, wood cutter, cobbler and so forth) also indicates that Tantricism was chiefly patronized by the members of the inferior classes.⁵³

Sahajiya Buddhists strictly attached to *Guruvada* (devotion to preceptor) or Preceptor disciple lineage.⁵⁴ This led to achieve the *de facto* aristocratic status of the *guru* (preceptor) which was not possible to obtain such position by birth in Brahmanical social system. A large number of Sahajiya siddhas came from the lower caste families, exalted through sincere devotion by the followers of Sahajayana. Siddha Minnatha who hailed from the fisher community of Kamarupa, was followed by the people of different professions such as *Hali* (a peasant), *Mali* (a gardener) and *Tambuli* (a tooth painter).⁵⁵ Accordingly, they developed a separate institution parallel to the royal institution that patronized *Varnasrama*.

Sahajiya Siddhas shaped their own orthodox norms outside the value and norms of the Brahmanical society. The king provided law and order; the *Siddhas* broke away and entered a new domain with its own rules. Thus, the non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha counteracted the ideological superstructure of Brahmanical social system (the caste system and the four orders of life or *Varnasramadharmas*) and slackened many restrictions prevalent in Hinduism. In Kamarupa, professional class such as 'Dom' or Kaivartas who had their sound economic condition⁵⁶ fostered the desire to have higher or equal position in the society and they embraced Buddhism.⁵⁷

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 330. For details, see S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp. 262-263.

⁵³ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

⁵⁴ The Sahajiyas laid more emphasis on *Guruvada* or stress on preceptor. The selection of a proper *guru* or preceptor for guiding the initiate to the path of *Sadhana* is very important in the Sahajiya school. Gayatri Sen Majumdar, 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal,' *op.cit.*, p. 259.

⁵⁵ Bhupendranath Datta, (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, Ramkrishnan Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁶ Doms or the *Kaivartas* enjoyed their sound socio-economic status but in the framework of *Varnasramadharmas*, they were of low-grade. About 9th century, they constitute a powerful group in the society. Mukunda Madhab Sarma, *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-83.

⁵⁷ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1972, p. 142.

These Siddhas were free from the prevailing social norms, institution but not refrained from observing the prevailing practice of society. They accumulated the spirit to criticize social distinctions based on birth and profession and opposed the hegemonic ideology of caste. Their apathy towards some Brahmanical system found its echo in the *Carya Padas* composed by Sahajiya Siddhas. The first social criticism (the rejection of the orthodox social order and the rejection of the Vedic sacrificial system) found expression in the writings of Sahajiya Siddha Saraha who was born in *Sudra* family of Kamarupa.⁵⁸

He criticized this in following words-

‘Brahmins as a caste cannot reasonably be recognized to be the highest of men, for the saying that they dropped from the mouth of Brahma is a myth invented by section of clever and cunning people; if, on the other hand, a man becomes Brahmin by religious initiations (*Samskara*) then even the lowest of men may be a Brahmin...’⁵⁹

Saraha also criticized the religious practices performed by Brahmins through the dohas(*Carya song*) in following words:

*‘Kajje virahiya huavaha homen/
Akkhi vhave kadunam dhumem//*

‘The Brahmanas take earth, water, *kusa* grass and recite *mantras* and perform fire –sacrifices in their houses, in vain do they offer *ghee* to the fire, for thereby their eyes will only be affected with intense smoke.’⁶⁰ Thus, the first social criticism (the rejection of the orthodox social order and the rejection of the Vedic sacrificial system) found expression on the writings of Sahajiya siddha who hails from the region.

Buddhist siddhas, considered the pride in social identity and virtue was the most insidious to spiritual liberation. Taranathata portrayed the incident how Siddha

⁵⁸ B. Bhattacharya, ‘*Origin and development of Vajrayana*’, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol.iii, 1927, pp. 745-746.

⁵⁹ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious*, Firma KLM Calcutta, 1949 (1st edn.) reprint 1995 Firma KLM, p. 55.

⁶⁰ Vide, *Dohakosa* of Sarahapada, P.C. Bagchi, as referred in Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult*, *ibid.*, p. 55.

Luipada of Kamarupa mitigated his caste pride by the influence of Buddhism in following words, “He had still the caste-pride remaining in him, because when a Dakini gave him food, he threw it away. He recognized this hesitation and scruple to be hindrances to his *bodhi*, therefore he atoned with such bad food.”⁶¹ It has also been mentioned in the same source that ‘Acarya Vaidyapada taught Avadhuti Yogi Ratnasila of Kamaru’.⁶² Accordingly, Vaidyapa a Brahman *Sadhaka*, got *Siddhi* through a *Candali Yogini* and gave preaching to a *Yogi Ratnasila* of Kamarupa.⁶³ K.L. Barua believes the Kamarupa ruler Ratnapala became a tantric Buddhist or the adherents of the system of Vajrayana.⁶⁴ Thus, even the Brahmana and the King of Kamarupa was influenced by the Buddhism and took *diksa* (initiation) of a *Candali Yogini*, who was a member of lower order of *varna* based society.

It has been considered by a section of scholars that the practices of Vajrayana associated with *Vamacara* practices became a factor of social indiscipline and moral degradation and violated the rules of morality.⁶⁵ Popular tantricism incorporated all kinds of worldly enjoyment, such as wine woman fish, meat and all kinds of exiting food, which are argued to be symbolic by most followers of Tantra in the form of five *makaras*, *mamsa* (meat), *madya* (alcohol), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (physical gesture) and *maithuna* (sex-play).⁶⁶ The five moral precepts (*Panchasila*) is now taken by *Panchamakaras* the ideal of Nirvana gives way to that

⁶¹ Datta, Bhupendranath (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

N.B. Avadhuti sect has great affinities with the Natha sect that developed from Sahajayana school. P.C Bagchi, ‘Evolution of Tantras,’ *The Cultural Heritage of India*, *op.cit.*, p. 224.

⁶³ *Maheswar Neog Rasanawali*, published by Rajendra Mohan Sarma, on behalf of Maheswar Neog trust, Canra Prakash, vol.1, p. 37.

⁶⁴ K.L. Barua, ‘Kamarupa and Vajrayana’, *J.A.R.S.*, vol. ii, no. 2, 1934, p. 48.

N.B. the inscriptional account does not indicate Ratnapala became a tantric Buddhist or the adherents of the system of Vajrayana. It believes that Kamarupa rulers received *Diksa* only in their private life. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, pp. 342-343.

⁶⁵ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, *op.cit.*, pp. 278-279; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, ‘Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist’, *The cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, pp. 262; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma KLM Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁶ Popular tantricism emphasized rites involving addiction to five makaras –*Matsya* (fish), *Mamsa* (meat), *Madya* (intoxicating drink), *Maithuna* (sex). D. N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar Publisher, New Delhi first edition, 2004, p. 208; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste.*, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

Mahasukha(Great Delight) attainable not through *Sila*, *Samadhi* and *Prajna*, not even by the noble Eightfold Path, but by a mystic union with the *Yogini*.⁶⁷

According to Maurice Winternitz, Pala-period of Buddhism was “an unsavory mixture of mysticism, occult pseudo-science, magic and erotics.”⁶⁸ Binoytosh Bhattacharya also opines that that the texts of the Vajrayana are "specimens of the worst immorality and sin."⁶⁹

In Tantric Buddhism, the *Dukkhavada* of the Buddha was replaced hedonism associated with the relations of vajrasatva. The rationalism of early Buddhism gave way to superstitious sorcery and erotic esotericism. According to Joshi, among the internal factors in the decay of Buddhism in India, the abuses of Vajrayana perhaps occupy the foremost place.⁷⁰ The association with sexuality is quite explicit in many Tantric texts, particularly the *Guhyasamaja-tantra* that describes elaborate rituals for group.⁷¹

On the other hand, with the development of psychoanalysis, researchers on tantra have tried to establish a rational basis for its sexual practices. ‘In recent years the encouragement given by H. H. Dalai Lama to explore Tibetan Buddhism has given the outside world an opportunity to investigate the rational basis of tantric practices. In this way a massive multi-level hybridization has taken place in the recent decade and mystical aspects of tantric practices have been rationalized to some extent.’⁷²

Following that perception, scholar opines that Vajrayana teaches strict morality and discipline in society. He says, the aim of Buddha Tantric *sadhana* does not encouraged sexual indulgences rather imposing strict rules and severe discipline in process of *Sadhana*. The main object of the *Tantra Sadhana* is to overcome the strong desires for sensuous enjoyment or infatuation with the worldly enjoyment.⁷³

⁶⁷ Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1967, p. 310.

⁶⁸ Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. 2. University of Calcutta, 1933, p.389.

⁶⁹ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya (ed.), *Sadhanamala*, 2 vols. Gaekwad's Oriental Series 26 and 41, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1929, p. xxi.

⁷⁰ Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture in India*, p. 311; S. R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 390.

⁷¹ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste.*, op.cit., p. 112.

⁷² Pranshu Samdarshi, ‘The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions’, *The Delhi University Journal*, vol.1, 2014, p. 91.

⁷³ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., pp. 11 & 44- 47.

Accordingly, the mystic union of *Prajna* and *Upaya* has nothing whatsoever to do with the gratification of the senses rather it represents the complete transformation of ordinary sense desire.⁷⁴ From a gender point of view, tantra clearly is an effort to redress the rather puritanical attitude towards sex that is found in Theravada Buddhism.⁷⁵ The sexual norms and relation is different between the Brahmanism and tantric form. The Brahmanical norms stress the maxim that a man takes a wife for producing son. The Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas on the contrary seek release from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth and seek it in a love, in which there need not be issue.⁷⁶

In the writings of neo-Vaisnavite reformers of Kamarupa it has been referred frequently about the violation and degradation of socio-ethical rule by the followers of Buddhism. They periodically mentioned and criticized about the excess including the sex immorality committed by Buddhists Tantrics. Ramayana dvija in his *Vamsigopalcarit*⁷⁷ there was reference of Buddhist of upper Assam who appeared to be devotees only outwardly, while followed the views of the heretics in actual practices. Such people were indulging in a lot of immorality without having any respect of food and sex.⁷⁸ They also mentioned that even the Brahmanas also followed such customs that were performed by the Buddhist.⁷⁹ Sankardeva expresses his high resentment against this degradation. He described that Buddha incarnation as leading to the desertion of the Vedic culture, cheating of the people with *sastras* advocating *Vamacara* and to people's remaining deluded to the extent

⁷⁴ The Mahayana form of Buddhism conceives *Pragya* (perfect knowledge) and *Upaya* (universal compassion) and believes the union of two can lead to attain '*Boddhicitta*'. The Tantric form of Buddhism following this abstract principle regarded *Pragya* as female and *Upaya* as male entity. They performed various rites and rituals to realize the truth. It is a system of *Sadhana* involving psycho-physiological realisation of ultimate truth. Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, Concept Publishing, Delhi, 2009, p. 11

⁷⁵ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, op.cit., p. 112.

⁷⁶ Nupur Choudhary and Rajat Kanta Ray, 'Eros and History' Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, op.cit., p. 107.

⁷⁷ Maheswa Neog, 'Vamsigopal Carit', *Maheswa Neog Rachanavali*, vol.iv, published on behalf of Maheswar Neog memorial trust by Rajendra Mohan Sarma, Chandra Prakash, 2008, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁸ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1992, vol.III, p. 241.

⁷⁹ S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam' *I.H.Q.*, 1927, no.1, vol. iii, p. 750.

of indulging in the practices of the heretics.⁸⁰ Sankardeva also mentions that Kalki incarnation descend on earth towards the end of *Kali age* and will massacre the Mlecchas, exterminate all the ‘*Baudha*’s that there be, and establish the Truth.⁸¹ *Katha Guru carita* (88 sec) describes that two Buddhist magicians of the time of Sankardeva who used to play the false roles of a sick man and a physician curing a sick man and thus used to cheat the people and rob them of cloth, money and paddy.⁸² There is a description in the *Vyasasrama* of Rama Saraswati’s, how the Buddhist preached door to door (even in the guise of vaishnava) and earned money by performing sorcery.⁸³

Morality and ethics were entirely social construct and the religious rites always appropriated with the needs of the contemporary society.⁸⁴ The myth of Siva of burning *Madana Kama* (eros) and regain the life on prayer of Rati (goddess of sex) has taken place in *Kalikapurana*⁸⁵ throws some light about the sexual abuse resulted by the influence of Buddhist tantricism in contemporary society of Assam. According to the myth, Kamadeva, the God of love- the Indian Cupid, was sent by the gods to put an end to Siva’s mourning, due to the death of his consort. Madana Kama was burnt to ashes by the fiery glance of Siva. Panic-stricken gods tried to save Kama and ultimately later recovered his original form (*rupa*).⁸⁶ Vajrayanists performed some practices that are known as ‘*Kaya Sadhana*’ and *Cakra Sadhana*.

⁸⁰ ‘*Buddha avatare veda patha kari channa vamacara sastre mohi ache sarvajana*’
‘*Sadaye pramatta loka pasanda acare.*’

Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev ‘*Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha*, Narayan Chandra Goswami (ed.), Students stores, Guwahati, second edition 2001, p. 4; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. III, *op.cit.*, p. 241.

⁸¹ ‘*Kalira sesata haiba kalki avatar*
Kati mari mlechaka kariba bundamar
Sabaku badhiba Baudhagan jata ache
Kalir sesat satya prabataiba pache’,

Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev ‘*Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha*, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁸² *Katha guru carita* mentions two Baudha tatakiya (Buddhist magician) who used to cast evil spells on people while Sankardeva was living in Belguri. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, p. 241; Upendra Chandra Lakharu (ed.), *Katha Guru Charitra*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati (5th edn.), 2006, p. 35.

⁸³ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.III, *op.cit.*, p. 241.

⁸⁴ Irfan Habib (ed), *Religion in Indian History*, *op.cit.*, p. xiii

⁸⁵ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, Distributors Assam Book Depot, Lawyer’s Book Stall, Guwahati, 2004, p. 15.

⁸⁶ *Kalika Purana*, *op.cit.*, p. 152; K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

They annihilated the sexual desire through the practice of ‘*Kaya Sadhana*’ and through *Cakra Sadhana* they gave the new form of this desire.⁸⁷

The story was developed in the backdrop of the prevailing social norms in matter of sex just after the heyday of Buddhist tantricism. From this myth, it may be presumed that during the period of the composition of *Kalikapurana*, i.e. period of the prevalence of the Buddhist tantricism in Assam, some practices were followed that was not for the gratification of sense desire rather than to the destruction of the same. Therefore, Hinduise *upapurana* allegorically portrayed the above story to mean that the complete destruction of the desire would discontinue the worldly creation.

As the aim of Buddha Tantric *sadhana* does not encourage sexual indulgences and impose strict rules and severe discipline in the process of *Sadhana*.⁸⁸ There are no contemporary source materials that throws the light about the sexual abuse or indulgences resulted by the development of Buddhist tantricism in the hey-day of Vajrayana, rather than there was great reverence towards Buddha that found expression in the inscription.

In the Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription(v.18) of Dharmapala (assigned to first half of 12th century C.E.), it has found mentioned ,

‘*Tasyabhabadrarata etyabhibhutapapah sakyau pamah
samadamaprasavaikabhu,mi.Satkarmakarmatathaiya biratasuvevyah
savyah satam gunavatantilakasta nuja*’

‘He had a son, named Bharata , who was above all sins, and similar to Sakya (Buddha), and the sole source for the origin of *Sama* (quietism) and *dama* (restrains), who being exclusively devoted to the six *karmans* (acts) enjoyed remained aloof from the inauspicious, who was polite and best amongst (i.e. an ornament of) the good and meritorious men.’⁸⁹

⁸⁷ For details, see Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, *Devi*, Sahitya Prakash, Tribune Building, Guwahati, 1986, pp. 82-183.

⁸⁸ ‘The mystic union of *Prajna* and *Upaya* has nothing whatsoever to do with the gratification of the senses rather it represents the complete transformation of ordinary sense desire. Lalan Prasad Sing, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., pp. 11 & 44- 47.

⁸⁹ The translation of the verse referred M. M. Sharma *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 247.

Thus, the comparison of the person, holder of high quality, with *Sakya* in the inscription during the period that influenced Vajrayana form of Buddhism in Assam indicates the admiration to Buddhism in contemporary society. From the above discussion, it is clear that from its introduction to the heyday of early Salastambha, Buddhists of Assam did not perform such practices that create moral degradation as well as social problem.

Mahayanists advocated the doctrine of two fold truth in the teachings of Buddha, the outer exoteric truth meant for ordinary people and esoteric truth meant for the highly evolved one.⁹⁰ *Tantra Sadhana* is very risky and thus kept secret, and was imparted only to a man of higher spiritual attainment who could practice this *Sadhana*. Without proper moral discipline and a *guru* of high order, one should not dare practice otherwise there is every possibility of a fall and degeneration.⁹¹ Therefore, in India, the moral welfare of the practitioners and the correct attitude towards the radical practices Buddhist tantricism went down from Guru to disciple through the close guarded secret and by the careful selection method employed by the tantric gurus.⁹² The esoteric form of Buddhism prescribed certain practices, which were liable to misused by the untrained recruits or misunderstood by the uninitiated.⁹³ Though it was forbidden to preach the Tantric doctrine publicly⁹⁴, but outside the monastery, the Sahajiya Siddhas such as, Saraha, Luipa, Padmavajra, Anangavajra and Indrabhuti publicly preached their doctrines and urged people to follow their tenets, doctrine and practices.⁹⁵ The disciplinary regulations gradually slackened down when the secret doctrine no longer remained secret.⁹⁶ The *Kriya* and

⁹⁰ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 211-212 .

⁹¹ Buddhist *tantra* has emphasized the importance of *yogic* practice, which is of course of very complex and risky. If it not practiced under the proper guidance of proper guru, it could be every chance of physical and mental degeneration and aberrations. Lalan Prasad Sing, *Buddhist Tantra* pp. 31, 46 & 61.

⁹² G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra*, op.cit., p. xiv.

⁹³ Editors preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.1, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1958, p. lxii.

⁹⁴ During a long period of nearly three hundred years, Tantricisim handed down from Gurus to disciples in an occult manner, before its followers could be numerically strong enough to preach them in public; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma KLM Mukhopadhyay Calcutta, 1958, p. 12.

⁹⁵ D.P. Chottopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1970, reprint, 1990, p. 153; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, p. 12.

⁹⁶ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 14.

Carya tantra, which were prescribed to perform with utmost secrecy, was extensively propagated and openly practiced by the Siddhas.⁹⁷

One such secret of secret tantra is *Anuttara tantra* which is mixture of void and sexual practice.⁹⁸ This *Anuttara tantra* was procured by a series of individual teachers. From the time of Saraha and Nagarjuna up to Sabaripa had entered the tradition of transmitting *Anuttara Gurhya–mantra* through the chain of preceptor to disciple.⁹⁹ In course of time, this secret and sex based tantra was penetrated to Hinduism and became popular. The Hinduised deity Kamakhya which was developed after ninth century is a synthesized form of Hindu Sakti tantra and *Anuttarat Tantra* of Buddhist practice.¹⁰⁰ Gradually, some sex-based rituals such as *Cakra Puja*, *Varabi Cakra* and *Yogini Cakra* are performed at Nilachala.

It is to mention here that though the tantric practices of Hinduism and Buddhism seem similar but the objectives of the two are different. The Buddhist Siddhas of Vajrayana (thunder path) and Sahajayana (inborn way) practiced both breath control and a form of sexual intercourse.¹⁰¹ In Buddha tantra sex is always the means, not for end; whereas in Hindu tantras, many sex-based rituals are ends or

⁹⁷ D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., pp. 153-153; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 462.

⁹⁸ In *Anuttara yoga* tantra all gods are represented as embracing their Saktis and rites performed to get nirvana accompanied by a circle of female Bodhisattvas (Locana, Mamaki, Pandara and Tara) see G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis*, Oxford University press London 1938, p. 283; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, pp. 462 & 468.

⁹⁹ D.P. Chottopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India*, op.cit., p. 153; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 12 and A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 462.

¹⁰⁰ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp. 23 & 41- 43.

¹⁰¹ Nupur Choudhary and Rajat Kanti Roy, 'Eros and History' as cited in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, op.cit., p. 115.

goals by themselves.¹⁰² Hindu tantric gave greater emphasis to worldly success and supposed to be obtainable through tantric practice.¹⁰³ Annuttara Tantra aims to generate compassion (*Karuna*) in the mind of the Sadhaka, whereas the Hindu *Vairabi Cakra*¹⁰⁴ aims to generate euphoria and sense of power in the mind of the participants.¹⁰⁵

The erotic-Yogic exercise introduced by Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas caught the popular imagination and was absorbed in Hinduism by ritual compromise. One such erotic- Yogic practice that was absorbed in Hinduism by ritual compromise is known as *Kaula* (Tantric orthodoxy).¹⁰⁶ Matsyendranatha the originator of *Kula* class of *tantra* propounded a school called '*Yogini Kaula*'¹⁰⁷ in Kamarupa in 11th century C.E.¹⁰⁸ The doctrine became popular in Kamarupa. It has been mentioned in

¹⁰² The basic principle of this *tantra* that the *Boddhicitta* to be realized through human body. Vajrayana emphasized the assimilation of '*Pragya*' and '*Upaya*' where man represents *Pragya*' and woman represents *Upaya*. The esoteric commingling of the two is the giver of supreme bliss (*Mahasukha*). The main object of the *Tantra Sadhana* is to overcome the strong desires for sensuous enjoyment or infatuation with the worldly enjoyment. The aim of Buddha Tantric *sadhana* does not encourage sexual indulgences imposing strict rules and severe discipline in process of *Sadhana*. The mystic union of *Prajna* and *Upaya* has nothing whatsoever to do with the gratification of the senses rather it represents the complete transformation of ordinary sense desire. 'Its purposes are never immoral, but the allegorical dramas enacted in Buddhist ritual and visualized by its practitioners always witness the triumph of good over evil and are interpreted as leading to Enlightenment.

For details of the view, see Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., pp. 11 & 44- 47; Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Begun: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1997, pp. 163-164.

¹⁰³ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 42.

¹⁰⁴ *Kama mudra* of Annuttara Tantra and *Vairabi Cakra* of Hindu Tantra has more or less the same rituals.

¹⁰⁵ Pranav Jyoti Deka differentiated the role of sex in the rituals of both Buddhism and Hinduism that performed at Nilachala. In his words, 'The Buddha tantra even where sex is permitted (Annuttara, Betulya) recognised that sexual rituals are functioned in bringing back the mind of the *Sadhaka* from total despondence, where it has fallen because of his sense of '*Sarba Sunya*' (universal void). The sense of void is to be replaced by compassion (*karuna*) to all living beings. The Sadhakas are repeatedly warned not to indulge in sex if sense of void is not complete or else sexual pleasure will become focus and the primary goal in the mind of the *sadhaka*, instead of compassion to the world. In contrast, Hindu Tantras, especially the '*Kaulika*' or Kuladevi tantras as Bagala Tantran, invest an enormous spiritual and material worth on the sexual rituals itself. The three primary sexual rituals practiced in Hindu Tantras on the Nilacala hills are namely *Cakra Puja*, *Vairabi cakra* and *Yogini cakra*,' Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁶ Nupur Choudhary & Rajat Kanta Roy, 'Eros and History' in Habib Irfan (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, op.cit., pp. 108-116; Acarya Manoranjan Sastri, 'Dharma aru Darshan' in Giridhar Sarma (ed.), *Asomiya Jatir Itibritta*, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, second edition, 1996, p. 117.

¹⁰⁷ *Yogini Kaula* is a compromise between debased Buddhism and saktism. R.M. Nath, 'Lui-Pada and Matsendranatha', *J A R. S.*, vol.II, no.1, 1939, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 188.

Kaulajnananirnaya that this book was available in every household of Kamarupa.¹⁰⁹ The followers of Kaulism disregards the traditional lore, discredits the outward pacificatory rites, and denounces the attempt to attain salvation by the study of the *sastras* and by exoteric practices, such as sacrifices, fasting, bathing and visiting holy places.¹¹⁰ Thus, we can easily observe that, some secret rites and rituals of Buddhist tantrism were absorbed within Hinduism and became popular there in too.

During the period of the development of Sahajayana School, the preaching of Buddhism in Assam was entirely attached with the personalities of Sahajiya Siddhas. Among the Siddhas who constantly associated with this land was Minnatha and he has been portrayed in the ballads and legends that are associated with Gorakhnatha Minnatha as ordinary person guided by lust. It has been mentioned that Siddha Minnatha had captivated by the spell of woman in Kadali and Gorakshyanatha went there and released his Guru.¹¹¹ Jatindra Kumar Borgohain believes that Kadali kingdom was located in Nagaon district near Garubat. The people who lived in this area (Garubat) of Kadali belong to Nath community.¹¹² S.B. Dasgupta says ‘The fall of Minantha in the company of woman, seems to be popular poetical version of the general attitude towards woman in general’¹¹³ that developed with the change of social paradigm. Tantric trends focus on Shakti that symbolized the power of woman. It has been said that Kadali kingdom known as *Narirajya* or woman kingdom and woman enjoyed considerable liberty due to prevailing Tantricism that accorded certain liberty.¹¹⁴ With the development of Aryan life, patriarchy became the norms of the society and portrayed the womenfolk as the factor of temptation of man and cause of moral degradation.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187; Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Datta Barua, second edition, 1978, appendix, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ P.C. Bagchi, ‘Evolution of Tantra’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 223.

¹¹¹ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth century AD*, *op.cit.*, p. 425.

¹¹² Jatindra Kumar Borgohain, *Asamar Sanskritik Itihas*, vol.1, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 2007, p. 87; R.M. Nath, ‘Antiquities of the Kapili and the Jamuna Valley’, *J.A.R.S.*, vol. v, no.1 & 2, pp. 35-36.

¹¹³ The episode of the captivity of Minanatha in the land of Kadali and his rescue by Gorakhnatha also may allegorically interpreted as the bondage of human soul through worldly pleasure and its redemption through practices of yoga. For details, see S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, *op.cit.*, pp. 201-202 & 244.

¹¹⁴ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century AD*, *op.cit.*, p. 224.

¹¹⁵ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

The fall or moral degradation of Minnatha also may be interpreted in another way. According to Bengal traditions, Gorakhnatha was originally a Buddhist by the name of Ramavajra belonging to Vajrayana. He was separated from Buddhist fold¹¹⁶ and converted to Saivism. After conversion, he took the new name, and became the protagonist of the later cult.¹¹⁷ It is said that Nepalese Buddhist are much displeased with Gorakhnath and portrayed his origin in *Pag-sam-jonzang* as Guraksha, a cowherd, and became reformer of Natha sect.¹¹⁸ By the story of degradation of Minnatha¹¹⁹ and the power to rescue him by Gorakhnatha, the composer tries to show the superiority of Saiva practice or Hinduism over Buddhism. However, in Assam the story circulated in succeeding periods, after the coming of Nathas and assimilation with the community with *Yogini Kaula*.¹²⁰

Of course, there is certain change in the life of non-institutional Sahajiya Siddhas in succeeding period. The non-institutional Sahajiya Siddhas who were attached with lower order, later made their relationship with political authority and received rich endowment.¹²¹ In course of time, the tantric practitioners who manipulated the super-normal powers for the purposes of personal power and gratification,¹²² used to harm other. During the period of Chilarai, one Buddhist tantric namely Khahata applied the evil technique to harm other.¹²³ This kind of practices of Vajrayana cannot be justified on a moral standard, which violated the

¹¹⁶ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult, op.cit.*, p. 199.

¹¹⁷ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphatha Yogis, op.cit.*, p. 150.

¹¹⁸ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult, op.cit.*, p. 199.

¹¹⁹ Minnatha is worshipped as Avalokiteswara in Nepal, *ibid.*, p. 198.

¹²⁰ For details, see D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, pp. 115-117.

¹²¹ The Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala (dated 1154 Saka, i.e. 1232 CE) mentions about the existence of satara institution in Yogahati, where rituals were performed.

It has mentioned in the Inscription " *Adityasama Srisamudrapalarajye PrabalaSabasikasatra Sagunkriya Sanyasin bule Danapunye Saja Yogihati Sak ish yanachakra murha vanati* "

'If Savasika satra means residential monastery, it might be possible that this was a monastery of the Buddhist Bhiksus practicing the esoteric Sadhanas of a tantric religion'. Dimbeswar Sarma(ed.), *Kamarupasanavali*, Publication Board, Assam, 1981, p. 159; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations, op.cit.*, p. 306.

¹²² In Buddhist literature, it found mentioned about the manipulation of incantations (*vidya*) by *Vidyadharas* for the purposes of personal power and gratification. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism, A Social History of the Tantric Movement, op.cit.*, pp. 193-194.

¹²³ *Maheswa Neog Rachanavali*, vol.1. *op.cit.*, p. 57. Note – Avicarvidya, i.e. black magic popularly attach with tantrics.

rules of morality.¹²⁴ It is opined that the revolting practices born out of Saktism and the latest phase of Buddhism demoralized to a great extent the social fabric of Kamarupa.¹²⁵ K.L. Barua says that much debased practice of Tantric Buddhism performed in Kamakhya and so to extirpate these practices Sankardeva and his associates preached the doctrine of Neo-Vaishnavism and succeeded in suppressing those in 15th and sixteenth centuries.¹²⁶

Sankardeva says that the *Kalki* incarnation descend on earth towards the end of *Kali age* and would massacre the *Mlecchas*, exterminate all the Baudhas that there be, and establish the Truth.¹²⁷ As the Tantric practitioners who indulged in carnal desires in the name of religion created social crisis thus Sankardeva allegorically used in his work 'the killing of Mleccha' only to mean to eliminate the unholy practices that are performed by the Buddhist tantric practitioners in contemporary Assam. It is equally worth mentioning here that neo-Vaishnavite saints inclined to the literatures of contemporary Orissa and perhaps this had reflected in the writings of neo-Vaishnavite literators. One such work is *Dipaka chanda* compiled by Purusuttam Gajapati.¹²⁸ The author attempted to establish the superiority of Vaishnavism over all other cults. The work might have influenced considerably the neoVaishnavite saints of Assam and accordingly some anonymous writer translated it to Assamese.¹²⁹

Tantric traditions are ancient, and may well have had a base in ancient tribal collectivism and in rites connected with early agriculture and woman's role in it. They identified human body with the cosmos and they emphasized male-female

¹²⁴ Some of the Buddhist secretly practiced things against the ethical rules of Buddhism. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, p. 262; *idem.*, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

¹²⁵ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, p. 306.

¹²⁶ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1960, p. 10.

¹²⁷ 'Kalira sesata haiba kalki avatar

Kati mari mlechaka kariba bundamar

Sabaku badhiba Baudhagan jata ache

Kalir sesat satya prabataiba pache',

Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhavdev, *Kirtan Gosha and Nam Gosha*, Narayan Chandra Goswami(ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Purusuttam Gajapati, was ruler of Orissa in the 15th century. Pratap Rudra, who was a devoted disciple of Caitanya Deva, succeeded him. Pratap Rudra did his utmost to drive away the remnants of Buddhism from his dominion. Hemchandra Goswami, *Descriptive catalogue of Assamese manuscript* University of Calcutta, 1930, p. 49.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

intercourse as the basis of life and the fertility of the soil and earth itself.¹³⁰ The views of Buddhists in many ways advanced for their times and the most advanced Buddhist concepts understood and practiced only by a minority in society. Society had not yet developed to prevent superstitions and irrational beliefs. Tantric Buddhism also used techniques to mental training, which were part of all the chief religions in India. The practitioners performed many malicious rites, however, these are done under strict control. It has been said that Vajrayanist's occasional 'religious debauchery served as a catharsis to his evil psychological propensities and was the real help to him in leading the good life as he understood it'.¹³¹ The Mahayana form of Buddhism conceives *Pragya* (perfect knowledge) and *Upaya* (universal compassion) and believes the union of two can lead to attain 'Boddhicitta'. The Tantric form of Buddhism following this abstract principle regarded *Pragya* as female and *Upaya* as male entity. It is a system of *Sadhana* involving psycho-physiological realisation of ultimate truth. It was an esoteric practice but when it spread through the Siddhas in the society, the majority of common people could not follow the original principle of this and overshadowed by much crude and corrupt practices. The subtle philosophy was difficult to understand by average people. Buddhist had incorporated and modified it in their religio-philosophical system but did not add a new mentality and absorbed greater Indian traditions. In the words of K.L. Barua¹³²:

'The esoteric teachings of the tenet were high and sublime but, they were actually comprehensible only to a few, called Siddhas. Whereas, the common folk was mystified by the feats of sorcery performed by the lower order of the preachers who could thus trade on the credulity of the common people and compel them to submit to their demands. It is therefore well that these esoteric teachers and their practices were suppressed by Brahmans and Vaisnavas of the later period not so much with the help of ruling kings but chiefly by appeal to the common people themselves'.

¹³⁰ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India, op.cit.*, p. 36.

¹³¹ A.L Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, Rupa and co. New Delhi, third edition, 1967, p. 281.

¹³² K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa, op.cit.*, p. 104.

Tantric Buddhist revealed certain practical aspects that are related to everyday life rather than its canonical version and could disseminate agricultural and medicinal knowledge, articulate requirements of society. Buddhist *tantras* also served an important social purpose by prescribing numerous rituals, remedies rites, and occult practices that are supposed to avert the adverse effects of poison, planets and diseases and drugs.¹³³ The worldly welfare of human beings associated the tasks such as curing illness; overcoming famines etc. are common concerns of all grades of Buddhists.¹³⁴ Numerous ideas and concepts are combined to affect the healing process, and various medications and treatments are used. Siddhas had assisted the diagnosis and provided solutions to local difficulties. Buddhist monks were also often served as a doctor among the lay folk.¹³⁵ In Kamarupa, the medieval *tantrika* acted as physician. Some of them have performed their practices that were based on *Kamakhya tantra*, which is an offshoot of Buddhist *Hevajra Tantra*.¹³⁶ Certain medical pills known as *Nagarjuna badi* are used in stomach-trouble still in use in Assam even these days related to his name they are prepared according to the prescription of Nagarjuna.¹³⁷ There is no sub caste like Vaidyas of Bengal practicing Ayurvedic system of treatment of Assam. This branch of medical science had been a virtual monopoly of the Brahmanas because of their accessibility to texts of the Ayurveda.¹³⁸ It may be presumed that the medication of Buddhist tantric Siddhas influenced specially the people outside the Brahmanical social system.

Daka-tantra, popularly called as *Dakar Vacan* (aphorism of Dak) which contains the wise and wholesome saying and aphorism regarding astrology,

¹³³ R.S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of Tantricism' in *idem.*, (ed.), *Indian Society Historical Probing People*, Publishing House, New Delhi, third edition, 1984, p. 175.

¹³⁴ Buddha used the knowledge of the Dharma to heal the illness that arose from the three poisons: greed, anger, and ignorance. Therefore, Buddha emphasizes the development of the right view, practice of the right action and training in the right meditation as an indispensable and just method to obtain freedom from the sufferings and a lasting state of peace and happiness. It emphasizes that the root or principal cause of suffering lies within the mind, while the external causes serve only as a condition. Apart from the superficial symptoms of suffering, physical ailments did not neglect. In the passage of time, Buddhists had developed a variety of formula to cure both physical and mental illness.

¹³⁵ A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, *op.cit.*, p. 499.

¹³⁶ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-63.

¹³⁷ K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, no. 2, 1934, p. 48.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

meteorology, omen, forecast, use of manure and seasonal forecast agriculture along with medicine. These are of great interest to domestic life and are popular among the people in the region, even today.¹³⁹ According to N.N. Choudhary, who edited the tantric text *Dakarnavah*, the word Daka means a wise man being derived from Tibetan *gDag*, which signifies wisdom or *Pragna*.¹⁴⁰ According to Asutush Bhattacharya, *Daka* is not an individual, rather a class of Buddhist tantric.¹⁴¹ It has been presumed that Vajrayana text *Dakarnava* was compiled in Kamarupa around the eleventh century.¹⁴² However, it was translated into Assamese during the Ahom rule¹⁴³.

Buddhist contributed to the social harmony and racial integration. Religious rites, practices bound together by codes of behavior, and contributed to develop some social community. In Assam Crypto Buddhist practices led to the growth of new Buddhist communities such as *Yogini Kaula*, which in course of time came to be known as the Nathas.¹⁴⁴ The Schools, namely *kaula* and *Nathas* propagated by Siddhas Nathas (after reformative measure led by Goraksanath) coming from other

¹³⁹ Nagendra Narayan Chaudhuri, *Dakarnavah—Studies in the Apabhramsa Texts of the Dakarnava* Calcutta Sanskrit Series, no.10, Calcutta Metropolitan Printing and Publishing House, 1935, p. 5; Maheswar Neog, *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, Candra Prakash, Guwahati, 1962, pp. 33 & 37.

¹⁴⁰ The worship of Dakini, the goddess of Wisdom comes from Tibet. In Tibetan language she is mentioned as Cye Seskyimkhah hgro ma. Dakini is the feminine form of the word Dak. Nagendra Narayan Chaudhuri, *Dakarnavah—Studies in the Apabhramsa Texts of the Dakarnava op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴¹ Maheswa Neog *Rachanavali*, vol.1, on behalf of Maheswar Neog memorial trust by Rajendra Mohan Sarma, Canra Prakash, Guwahati, 1996, p. 37.

¹⁴² The expression of '*Tammottarakulopattiyoginiyathanayika*', in the *Dakarnava* denotes *Uttarakula* or the north bank of the Brahmaputra and accordingly it believes that *Dakarnava* was composed in Kamarupa. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, p. 279.

¹⁴³ Hemchandra Goswami, *Descriptive catalogue of Assamese Manuscript*, Published by the University of Calcutta, 1930, no. 700.

¹⁴⁴ 'The Natha cult seems to represent a particular phase of Siddha cult of India. The similarity and mixture has been responsible for the frequent association of the Nath cult with the cult of the Tantric Buddhists in myth and legends. Whatever might have been the origin and development of the Nath cult and the cult of Buddhist Siddhacaryas, the fact is that Minanatha or Matsyendranatha, Gorakshanatha, Jalandhari and Cauranginath who are the most prominent among the Nathas, were all included in the list of the Buddhist Siddhacaryas. They were sometimes credited with some works on esoteric Buddhism which were translated in to Tibetan,'

As quoted in D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, pp. 110-120. For details, see S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult, op.cit.*, pp. 194-200.

side of Assam, assimilated with Assamese society and known as Nathas instead of *Yogini Kaula*.¹⁴⁵ This was a permanent contribution to social integration.

Sahajiya Siddhas who were the first line of temporal involvement with tribal and outcaste peoples¹⁴⁶ played an important role to serve as a contact among different cultural groups. They represented a wider spectrum of value. During the early medieval period, tantric Buddhist scholars or Sahajiya Siddha holding contact between Kamarupa, Bengal, Orissa, Mithila, Tibet and Nepal developed a cultural zone. They had developed a common bond of religious affinity.¹⁴⁷

The co-existence of diverse faiths, ideologies in Kamarupa is due to her age-long experience with various cultural traditions. With the development of Tantricism different ethnic and religious groups shared the same cultural space over a long period of time and learnt the ways of mutual accommodation. Tantric traditions had been continuing intercourse with Buddhist from neighbouring land and crept into socio-cultural life of Assam. Buddhism provided opportunity for the cultural contact with different countries. The Buddhist pilgrimage centers such as Kamakhya and Hajo provided opportunity for cultural interaction. The Buddhists from Tibet still visit Kamakhya to offer their worship to Vairocana deity at Kamakhya from mid of January to mid of February (month of *Magh*). Accordingly, early Kamarupa was an area of interaction of Buddhist Siddha from different lands such as Bengal, Nepal, and Tibet.

The cultural tie with Assam Tibet and Bhutan facilitated through the Mahayana form of Buddhism. From very early days, thus, the northern Assam got her Lamaism, which continues among the Sherdukpens, Monpas, Membas and Khambas besides the allied Bhutiyas who live along the border. Different groups bearing Theravada Buddhism namely Singphos, Phakiyal or Tai-Phake the Naras, the Turungs and the Aitonias also migrated in succeeding periods.¹⁴⁸ In the northeast, the Monpa, Sherdukpen and Memba traditions assert that Padmasambhava visited their territories in the eight century C.E. and preached

¹⁴⁵ D. Nath, 'The Nathas of Assam: A Historical Reconstruction', *op.cit.*, pp. 110-117.

¹⁴⁶ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

¹⁴⁷ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, pp. 233 & 317.

¹⁴⁸ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 89-103.

Buddhism among them. N.Sarkar refers to monastic records, which confirm the construction of Buddhist monasteries in the twelfth century C.E. or before that period.¹⁴⁹ The Bhutias used to come by the valley of the Manas river via Tasgong and Dewangiri to Hajo where a fair was usually held.¹⁵⁰ Hajo, which is famous for the Hayagriva Madhava cult¹⁵¹ was a great medieval center of trade in horse.¹⁵² The people in the Assam plain and the Hills lying along with northern border have been maintaining steady trade contact with Tibet. The Tibetan traders entered the lower lands through different routes which opened on the *duwars*, or doors like Bijni and Chapaguri in the present Kamrup district and Burigoma in the Darrang¹⁵³

A marked feature of Hindu society is its legal sanction for an extreme expression of social stratification in which women and the lower castes have been subjected to humiliating conditions of existence.¹⁵⁴ On the other hand Buddhism gave equality of opportunity in religious culture to women. Recent years have seen a number of writers draw upon Buddhist thought in their articulations of feminist epistemology. Rita M. Gross finds that "since all beings are fundamentally characterized by Buddha-nature, women and men, equally, are fundamentally Buddha, beneath adventitious secondary and superficial gender traits".¹⁵⁵ Of course, Buddha did not challenge the developing patriarchy but the forms of patriarchy, maintained by Buddhist were still different from the life ordained for woman in the *Manusmriti* and other orthodox Brahmanical texts.¹⁵⁶ Buddha emphasized the equality of men and women in early Buddhism by giving permission to women to

¹⁴⁹ For details, see N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, pp.133-136.

¹⁵⁰ S. Gupta, British Relations with Bhutan, p. 20 as cited in H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.III, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁵¹ The development of the Horse necked Hayagriva or Tam Din associated with Tibetan form of Tantric Buddhism or Lamaism. L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, Allen & Com, London, 1895, pp. 64, 164, 364 & 529.

¹⁵² N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India* Monarhar, New Delhi, 1995, p. 52.

¹⁵³ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, p.89.

¹⁵⁴ Uma Chakravarti, 'Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State' *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 28, no. 14 (Apr), p. 579.

¹⁵⁵ For details, see Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, Albany: Suny Press, 1993; June Campbell, *Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism*, George Braziller, New York, 1996; Anne C. Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995.

¹⁵⁶ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

gain access into the Sangha. Women from loyal families, trustworthy housewives, and prostitutes and all got equal right to practice *Dhamma*.¹⁵⁷ In Mahayana and Vajrayana, mantras were invoked to different female deities. In Tantric practice female partners, preferably outside marriage and outside his caste, are needed for the practitioners who would help him in a difficult eroto-yogic exercise.¹⁵⁸ Thus, it is argued that in Tantricism the woman is seems to be used as a ritual object or the woman functions as a “salvation tool”, as an “aid on the path to enlightenment.”¹⁵⁹ However, in tantricism male and female express a complex spiritual interdependence.¹⁶⁰

Female spirits were an integral part of tantra and gave the utmost importance to female divinities. In Buddhist tantra the superiority of goddesses comes across in a substantial way and goddesses who embodied supreme enlightenment were designated as “the Buddhas” and “the mother of all Buddhas. The tantric Buddhism places some female deities at the pinnacle of the pantheon, who personify the highest spiritual goals including Buddhahood.¹⁶¹

These female Buddhist divinities can broadly be grouped in two categories. The first represents cosmic power in a feminine form leading to the highest truth and attainments of liberation, often tagged as ‘Female Buddhas’. This group includes Mahayana goddesses such as Prajnaparamita and tantric goddesses such as Vajrayogini and Nairatmya. The other group consists of goddesses who are invoked to accomplish a range of practical aims such as protection from diseases and enemies, pursuit of knowledge, mental purification and for promoting a gradual

¹⁵⁷ Bhikkhu Silabhadra, *Therigatha*, Published by Mahabodhi Society, Calcutta-12, 1951, p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Nupur Choudhary and Rajat Kanta Ray, ‘Eros and History’, Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History, op.cit.*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁹ June Campbell, *Traveller in Space, op.cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Tantric Buddhism used the language of symbolism to illustrate its deeper thoughts. Some deep concepts were represented through the symbolic union of male and female figures. Intuitive wisdom (*prajna*) was considered to be a passive female quality of human nature while compassionate action was the male quality (*upaya*) and a union of both in the process of enlightenment was represented by an ecstatic union of male and female deities.’ As referred in Pranshu Samdarshi, ‘The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions’, *The Delhi University Journal*, vol.1, 2014, p. 89. For details, see S.B. Dasgupta, *An Introduction to tantric Buddhism*, Calcutta University, 1950, pp. 113-118.

¹⁶¹ Pranshu Samdarshi, ‘The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions’, *The Delhi University Journal*, vol.1, 2014, pp. 93-94

progress towards awakening and for specific areas of human needs. Such group includes the deities such as Janguli who protects against harm by snakes and poison; and Parṇasavari, a healing deity. Tara the most prominent female deity of Himalayan Buddhism has different manifestations depending on the tradition.¹⁶²

Mahayana Buddhism in the region was associated with female deity Tara along with its efficacy of mantra, which has been discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation. In Assam Hariti images are found in Nilacahala with a child in her lap. Buddhist had a humane attitude towards even the prostitutes.¹⁶³ It has been said by scholar that the institution of 'Devadasi' referred in inscriptions of Assam, was originally a part of Mahacina or the Tibetan form of Buddhism.¹⁶⁴ The females not merely played an important role in some tantric ritual practices but they were also proficient in scholarly activities. Some women who belonged to lower caste of *Varnasramadharma* also became Siddhas. Among them are Laksmikinkara, sister of King Indrabhuti, lived at Sambhalanagara, Manibhadra was a maid servant of Magadha Kalakala–Pa belonged to Devikota (North-Bengal) and Mekhala–Pa was the daughter of Agachenagar'.¹⁶⁵ Such female scholar who flourished in the region was *Sahajayogini Cinta*. She compiled *Vyaktavhabanugata tatta siddhi*.¹⁶⁶ From her book, it is evident that she was a great thinker and tried to provide philosophical basis for sahayayana.¹⁶⁷ Tantric Buddhism also gave religious sanction to woman for initiation. Vaidyapa a Brahman *Sadhaka*, get *Siddhi* through a *Candali Yogini* of Kamarupa.¹⁶⁸

The Buddhist contributed to uphold the innate tradition of human coexistence, mutual forbearance and religious toleration. The principles of love and compassion towards the creatures have still found expression in the *mantras* at

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁶³ Vijay Kumar Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, op. cit. p. 10

¹⁶⁴ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., p. 225.

¹⁶⁵ S. R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 263.

¹⁶⁶ Darikapa's female disciple Sahajayogini Cinta was the author of the Vajrayana work *Vyaktavhabanugatatattasiddhi*. H. K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, p. 279; P.C. Choudhary (ed.), *A catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies in Assam, Guwahati 1961, p. xii.

¹⁶⁷ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, op.cit., p. 64.

¹⁶⁸ Avadhuti sect has great affinities with the Natha sect that developed from Sahajayana School. P.C Bagchi, 'Evolution of Tantras,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, op.cit., p. 224; Maheswar Neog, *Rasanawali*, vol.1, op.cit., p. 37.

Kamakhya. According to tantric rites performed at Kamakhya, a tantric before taking food cite ‘*Om Kurmaya Namah*’ or ‘*Om Nagaya namah*’ (before taking food offer food even the creatures like the tortoise or snake) that reflects the inner philosophy of Buddhism i.e. love and compassion to creatures.¹⁶⁹

Buddhism flourished in a predominantly non-Aryan society of Assam when the Brahmanical social formation did not take its firm footing. Buddhism appropriated with its rites and rituals practices and developed tantricism. In early period, the small section of Buddhist group and the secret esoteric practitioners could not influence the society. After the seventh century C.E., the ritualistic practices of Vajrayana along with the non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha tradition influenced many aspects of the society of Assam.

The process of Hinduisation started in Assam when Kamarupa rulers patronized the large numbers of Brahmins. Most of the kings of Kamarupa extended every possible support to Hinduism that contributed to the new social formation. The people of hilly areas remained mostly out of Hindu impact. On the other hand, Buddhist Tantricism influenced that section of people whose social mobility was thwarted by taboos of *Varna* system of Brahmanical religion.

Cripto Buddhist practices led to the growth of new Buddhist communities like Yogini Kaula and Natha. Buddhism acted as crucible for generating many religious systems among which Nathism is one “Nathism has other ingredients as well derived from many sources. But Natha Siddhas are counted as belonging to the eighty four Buddhist Siddhacaryas and are credited to the authors of various texts on Tantric Buddhism¹⁷⁰

Buddhist tantrics performed some rituals, which were against the caste taboos of orthodox Brahmanism. The social groups who carry this religious tradition are the people of lower order of *Varanadharm*.¹⁷¹ Though Buddhist tantric practices influenced the development of Tantric trend within Hinduism, it did not

¹⁶⁹ Information collected from Jaleswar Sarma and other priests of Nilachala premise.

¹⁷⁰ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, op.cit., p. 130.

¹⁷¹ It has been said Dom who once embraced Buddhism was included in Hindu fold in succeeding periods, but they were looked down upon in Hindu society due to previous religious embracement Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, op.cit., p. 143.

succeed to eliminate caste hierarchical social values among the tantric practitioners of Hinduism.

According to some tantric practices, male practitioners mingle with female of low castes, and courtesans and thus force a male practitioner to abandon social pride.¹⁷² Such maintenance of caste rites clearly manifested in the rites of *Bhairavi Chakra* that was performed in Assam generally by the votaries of Hinduism. During the time of the ritual practices of *Bhairavi Chakra*, the practitioners associated with the people of different *varnas* but at the end of the *Chakra*, all the castes become separate again, i.e., the social order of castes become effective again.¹⁷³ The performers breached the caste hierarchy and rule in ritual but did not continue this breach of caste in social circle. There were also restrictive regulations about the choice of partners; a Brahmin woman should never be the partner of a man of lower social status¹⁷⁴ and accordingly retained caste hierarchical social values.

The Siddhas who were earlier attached to the lower order of the *Varna* based society in Kamarupa, subsequently established their relationship with political authority and received rich endowment.¹⁷⁵ Sahajiya Siddhas played an important role to serve as a contact link among different cultural groups too. The Buddhist pilgrimage, centers such as Kamakhya and Hajo provided opportunity for cultural interaction.

The violation and degradation of socio-ethical rule by the Buddhist (tantric) are frequently referred to in the writings of neo-Vaisnavite reformers of Kamarupa.¹⁷⁶ However, there are no contemporary source materials found that

¹⁷² Female partner preferably outside marriage and outside his caste, help the practitioners in difficult eroto-yogic exercise (*sadhana*). Nupur Choudhary and Rajat Kanta Ray, 'Eros & History', in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, op.cit., p. 108.

¹⁷³ A. Avalon and T. Vidyarnava (ed.), *Kularnava Tantra*, op.cit., p. 96; Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra, the path of Ecstasy*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 1998, p. 241.

¹⁷⁴ Bhagawati Suren and J Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati, 1994, pp. 84- 85.

¹⁷⁵ During the period of Samudrapala (dated 1154 Saka, i.e. 1232 C.E), there monastery of the Buddhist Bhiksus where the esoteric Sadhanas were performed. For details, see *Kamarupasanavali*, op.cit., p. 159; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p. 306.

¹⁷⁶ Maheswa Neog, 'Vamsigopal Carit', *Maheswa Neog Rachanavali*, vol.iv, published on behalf of Maheswar Neog memorial trust by Rajendra Mohan Sarma, Chandra Prakash, 2008, pp. 18-19; Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev 'Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha', op.cit., p. 4; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.III, op.cit., p. 241.

throw the light on about the sexual abuse or indulgences occurred during the heyday of Vajrayana. Contrary to the view, we find that there was great reverence towards Buddha that found expression even in the inscription.¹⁷⁷ When the Siddhas openly preached Vajrayana doctrine, it was difficult to understand the subtle philosophy by average people and overshadowed by many crude and ‘corrupt’ practices. Though the main aim of the tantric Buddhist practices was to achieve self control, in later period, these practices were manipulated for the purposes of personal power and gratification.¹⁷⁸

In subsequent periods, during the neo-Vaisnavite, movement led by Sankardeva anti-Buddhist propaganda reached its peak and the propagators of the same urged people to abandon such practices that created social anomalies. However, the Sahjayana movement was the forerunner of egalitarian concept of Sankardeva, which bestowed the message of social equality, opened the doors to higher religious life and the highest goal for all those who sought them, irrespective of *Varna* and gender. Though the neo Vaisnavite reformers were within the fold of the Brahmanical Hindu religious tradition, yet they revolted freely against many fundamental dogmas and authentic customs of traditional Brahmanism. Thus, we can say that the Buddhism and the Buddhist practices had have profound impact in Assam. This can be seen in forms of caste mobilization of lower castes to accept Buddhism, social bondings and of certain dogmas, gender equality.

¹⁷⁷ In the Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription (v.18) of Dharmapala (assigned to first half of 12th century C.E.), M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, op.cit.*, p. 247.

¹⁷⁸ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism, op.cit.*, pp. 193-194.

Chapter 5

Buddhism and its Impact on Cultural Developments

In the previous chapter of this dissertation, we have discussed the influence of Buddhism on the social life of Assam. In this chapter we are going to discuss Buddhist influence on rites and rituals, art and sculpture, language and literature of Assam.

Culture is the way of life of a people. In simpler term, a society is composed of people; the way they behave is their culture.¹ Culture includes all areas such as literature, music, dance, drama, printing, painting, architecture and art. Culture and religion concern and deal with some similar human issues in terms of the concept of values. Religious faith sometime determines the development of cultural life of a region. Buddhism deeply influenced various aspects of cultural life of India.² L.M. Joshi projecting Buddhism as something different form of culture than Hindu culture, said ‘Originally peculiar to the Sramanic tradition, moral and ascetic ideas, religious practices and institutions, art and literature, education and learning, inspired by the teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha, constitute what has been called the Buddhist culture.’³ He further asserts that Buddhist culture may be viewed as constituting ‘The dominant strand of Indian Culture’ and development of Puranic Hinduism that was contributed by the process of assimilation between Vedic Brahmanism and Buddhism.⁴ It has been said that Buddhist ideas and concepts permeated in the entire religious and philosophic thought and percolated into the deepest of the religious mentality of the present day Hindus.⁵ The Brahmanical

¹ Meville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, Oxford & IBH Publishing 1955, first Indian edition 1969, New Delhi, p. 316.

² Benimadhab Barua, ‘Some Aspects of Early Buddhism’, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.I, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta, second edition, 1958, p. 442.

³ Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1967, p. 328.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 327 & 329.

⁵ Satkari Mukherji, “Buddhism in Indian Life and Thought” *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 575.

religion, that evolved with popular cults, based on the doctrine of *Bhakti*, borrowed from Buddhism.⁶

Though the essential features of the post-Buddha Hinduism i.e. the doctrine of *Bhakti*, *avatarvada*, Puja rituals and image worship etc. did not evolved from the main teachings of the Buddha which was base on the philosophy of sorrows, (*dukkhavada*), Four Noble Truths and Eight-fold path etc., could develop from the Mahayana form of Buddhism which laid emphasis on image worship, prayers, incarnations etc..⁷ Mahayana and Vajrayana forms of Buddhism incorporated folk beliefs into their system. Simultaneously, Hinduism also developed their pantheons particularly from Gupta and post Gupta period, most of them are common to both religious systems.⁸ Historical development of Buddhism and Hinduism is parallel and the impact of Buddhism and Brahmanism are mutual.⁹ Bhikshu Santarakshit comments, 'If Buddhism appropriated with the forms of Hinduism, Hinduism assimilated with something with the spirit of Buddhism'.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Buddhism had profound impact on the course of history of Hinduism in India.

Assam is not an exception with this phenomenon. The later aspect Buddhist practices i.e. Tantricism which was strong cultural trend during the development of pre-Puranic and Puranic Hinduism, contributed to the cultural life of Kamarupa. Worship and rituals forms are the major dimensions of religion have had the Buddhist impact on Kamarpua. Some other dimensions of the religious phenomenon are myths, rituals, doctrines, theology, mystic experience, socio-ethical content etc. Buddhist practices influenced all these aspects which became the major cultural tradition of Assam. It was not only the rites and rituals that were influenced by

⁶ It is stated by the scholars that 'Ideas of compassion and saving grace of the Avalokiteswara (in the Mahayana Buddhism) resemble the growth or development of the Bhakti cult in Hinduism. *The Way of the Buddha*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcastings, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1985, p. 327. For details, see Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p. 93; D.N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar, New Delhi, 2004, p.143.

⁷ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerat, 1987, pp. 271 & 397.

⁸ For details, see *ibid.*, p. 397; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1958, p. 1.

⁹ B.K. Sarkar and H.K. Rakshit, *The Folk Elements in Hindu Culture*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, second edition 1981, preface, vii-viii. S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism, op.cit.*, p. 271.

¹⁰ Bhikshu Santarakshit, 'Buddhism', in A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 7th impression, 2002, p. 98.

Buddhism but the influence is noticeable in the philosophic speculation, art, architecture, language and literature i.e. all the strata of socio-cultural life of the region.

From the discussion in previous Chapter it emerges that Buddhism entered the region before the development of Brahmanical religious system. In early period the Buddhist groups associated with its local faith and ritual practices that are predominantly of non-Aryan or pre-Aryans religious¹¹ and developed tantricism. Mahayana and Vajrayana incorporated local cult practices which are in course of time, absorbed by the followers of Hinduism.

In Assam, Buddhist tantrics contributed to the process of assimilation between the faiths of aboriginals with the orthodox Brahmanical system. Mother goddess Kamakhya who has been associated from Assamese culture from the early period is one of the examples of it. As discussed in the chapter three of the dissertation, in the early period, aboriginal peoples were associated with mother cult at Nilachala.¹² At the same site, Buddhist worshipped their female deity Tara with tantric practices. In successive period the votaries of Brahmanical religion continued to perform their practices and developed tantric traits and there developed Hinduised deity Kamakhya through a long process of psycho-sexual experimentation and philosophies that were the contribution of both Buddhist and Hindus.¹³ Gradually, the follower of Brahmanism in Kamarupa were able to provide the deity a pan Indian identity through the myth and portrayed Kamakhya as the Mother Goddess.¹⁴ In the formation of the myth the role of Vishnu is also very important. Thus, it provides an example of reciprocal acculturation between Hindu and aborigines that is contributed by Buddhism i.e. Buddhist Tantricism.

¹¹ The early religious faith of the region is of non-Aryan and Pre-Aryans who believed fetishism, magic, the fertility cult and the worship of sun.

¹² For details, see Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004, pp. 16 & 38-40.

¹³ The goddess Kamakhya-Kameswari that represents as Kamakhya was synthesized from the Hindu Sakti tantra and Buddhist *Annuttara tantra*. For details, see Pranav Jyoti, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, Distributors Assam Book Depot, LBS, Guwahati, 2004, pp. 23 & 43; Boby Das and Utpal Saikia, 'Development of Kamakhya Tirtha: A Brief Analysis', *PNEIHA*, thirty third session, Itanagar, 2012, pp. 159-165.

¹⁴ B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

Other major sectarian tenets of Hinduism, i.e. worship of Siva was also influenced by Buddhist rites. Siva worship was prevalent in early Assam amongst both the aboriginal and Aryanised people.¹⁵ Vajrayana adopted a number of forms of Siva in their religious system¹⁶ and contributed to develop various forms of Siva. Accordingly, the hybrid deity that represents Kala Bhairava was developed, which was a mixture of Hindu Mahakala Bhairava and Boudha Heruka.¹⁷ Tantric Buddhism also influenced the nature of worship of the form of Vishnu i.e. Hayagriva in Assam which was worshipped by the tantric mode of worship.¹⁸ The mention of the deity Hetuka Sulin in a inscription of the ninth century C.E., clearly indicates the popularity and importance of the deity.¹⁹ Scholars identify the deity as Siva, due to holding a shaft in his hand, as Siva generally holds a trident in his hand.²⁰ In fact, holding trident in the hand was also the feature of Tantric form of Buddhism, which was associated with Assam during Salastambha.²¹ According to Buddhist tantric belief and practice, 'Heruka' is a prime deity of Buddhist tantric, which was prevalent in Kamarupa during that period.²² Sometimes scholars are also confused about 'tu' and 'ru', and Nagari 'tu' often wrote as 'ru'.²³ The institution of devadasi, which was originally a part of Mahacina or the Tibetan form of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13 ,

¹⁶ Hara or Sambhu, the synonymn of Siva, became Heruka or Sambara respectively among the Vajrayanists. Hara, Sambhu and Bhairava are among the various names of Siva. For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya, op.cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁷ For details, see *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁸ Tantric rituals influenced the Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva, who was worshipped with Tantric rituals eight syllables, twelve syllables and eighteen syllables mantras. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.III, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1994, p. 229; Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 38-40; Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a brief Study', *PNEIHA*, thirty first Session, Tura, 2010 pp. 47-51; Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati, 1994, pp. 527-551.

¹⁹ Parbatiya Copper Plate Grant of Vanamalavarmadeva, verse 24; M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Department of Publication, G.U. Assam, 1978, p. 122.

²⁰ Dimbeswar Sarma (ed), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, Publication Board of Assam, 1981, p. 154.

²¹ Padmasambhava who was associated with the land between Tibet and Kamarupa in 8th century is stated 'even mild form of the image of Ogyan guru (Padmasmbhava) has dissipated human heads strung on to his trident. L.A. Waddell, *Lamaism*, Allen & Com. London, 1895, pp. 313-314.

²² Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography, op.cit.*, p. 155.

²³ Anandaram Barua (ed.), *Nanartha-Samgraha*, Publication Board of Assam, 1884, reprint, 1969, p. 33.

Buddhism,²⁴ prevailed in the temple of Hetuka Sulin like the temple Hayagriva at Hajo.²⁵ It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter of the dissertation that Hayagriva in Assam developed with the association of Buddhist tantricism.²⁶ Thus, it can presume that Hetuka might have derived from Heruka and the deity Hetuka Sulin developed out of the influence of Buddhist Tantricism.

Buddhist rites and practices not only influenced the three major sectarian branches of Hinduism in Assam, but also innumerable other cult practices. There were free interchange of deities among the followers of Buddhism and Hinduism during the development of Vajrayana.²⁷ Some deities are common to both religious systems viz. Hinduism and Buddhism. They are Kartikeya, Hayagriva Kubera, Balabhadra and Indra, Saraswati, Ganapati are found expression in the literatures or iconography in Assam. Some of the deities were generally identified by scholars as Brahmanical one without emphasizing on any sectarian identity. It is to mention here that before assuming the prominent place in neo-Brahmanical religion in Kamarupa, some of the deities were associated with Buddhism. Among such deities, one is Kartikeya.²⁸ The Buddhist source suggests that the deity Kartikeya had been associated and worshiped by the followers of Buddhism prior to the development of Puranic trend in Assam. It has been mentioned clearly in the early Buddhist literature *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* that the *mantras* of Kartikeya, given by Manjusri

²⁴ M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 122; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1990, p. 225.

²⁵ 'The Tejjpur grant of Vanamala (v.24) refers to the gift of dancing girls or devadasis of the temple of Hetuka Sulin and the practice continued in the Hayagriva temple at Hajo in the district of Kamarupa'. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, op.cit., p. 297. For further details on the Devdasi practices in Assam, see J. Gogoi Nath, "Temple Girls of Assam: Their Role in the Medieval Society", in Fozail Ahmed Qadri (ed.), *Society and Economy in North-East India* vol.II, Regency, New Delhi, 2006.

²⁶ Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study', op.cit., pp. 47-51.

²⁷ Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

flourished in Kamarupa.²⁹ There are numbers of images of Kartikeya found in different parts in the region viz. Da-Parbatiya, Urvasi, Divastan (Nagaon district). In course of time, i.e. during *Puranic* period, Kartikeya became a part of the worship of Durga, the Brahmanical mother goddess.³⁰

Some minor deities who were originally associated with Mahayana form of Buddhism were absorbed within Hinduism. For instance, Hayagriva is not a sufficiently famous god in the Hindu pantheon to merit worship in a temple, but he occupies high reputation in the Buddhist *Tantras* and in the Buddhist pantheon but in course of time it was absorbed within Hinduism as an incarnation of Vishnu.³¹ Buddhism absorbed some local deities such as yakṣi and Hariti that prevailed in various parts of India.³² The cult yaksha was known in the region of North-West India from earliest times.³³ In Buddhist literary source, there is reference to good or bad *Yakshas*. *Yakshas* are also regarded as a custodian of wealth and worshipped especially for treasure and one such *Yakshas* was Kubera or Kubera Vaisravarna.³⁴ Mahayana Buddhist accepted Kubera as their deity and as a sign of popularity amongst traders and merchants he was portrayed with a purse (of wealth) in one hand.³⁵

²⁹T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, vol-III, Trivandrum Sanskrit series, no. lxxxiv, 1925, p. 628.

‘Kartikeyashya e mantrah kathita Manjubhanina
Tasmidese tada sidhi bhabiswati na sansaya
Sriparbate tada dese Vindhyakuksinitambayu
Dipebyeya cha sarbata Kalingadesu kityate
Ttrygunya Mlecchadesesu samantata
Ambhuge kukshiniranta nripakhyanta anantaka
Kamarupakalakhya hi Himadre kuksimasrita....’

³⁰ For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, pp. 365-366 & 375-376.

³¹ Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, p. 69; Boby Das, ‘*Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study*’, *op.cit.*, 2010, pp. 47-51.

³² Ram Nath Misra, *The Yaksha Cult and Iconography*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1979.

³³ The name *Yaksha* might have originally denoted a wondrous thing and so *Yaksha* could have been regarded as the embodiment of spirit or genius capable of doing wonderful things. A cult developed around such supposed *genni*. For details, see Sarita Khettry, ‘Buddhism and Contemporary Religions of the North-West: Syncretism, Assimilation and Conflict (c. first century B.C. –c. fifth century A.D.)’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 69th session, Kannur, 2008, pp. 74-75.

³⁴ Dighe Nikaya, III, p. 195f. As cited in, *ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

³⁵ For details, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, p. 361 .

Kubera was worshipped among the semi-Hinduised people in Assam as a form of lord of the Yaksas and Kinnaras. As a village deity, he is even today worships under the different names, such as Jal Kuber, (the lord of water), the Sthal Kuber (the lord of earth) and so forth.³⁶ Fishermen of Salkocha, Bongaigaon and Abhayapui areas, offer special *pujas* to Kubir, along with Machang, Jakh, Jakhini before starting the fishing operations for the year.³⁷ It has already been mentioned in this dissertation that fishermen who are identical was Dom in Assam, embraced Buddhism.³⁸ Thus, it indicates that the deity Kubera which was once a Buddhist tantric deity was associated with this social group. The lone icon represents the pre-Ahom art found in the region displays the characteristic of the same.³⁹

Saraswati, the goddesses of learning is equally popular among both the Hindus and Buddhists of Assam.⁴⁰ Buddhist goddess Tara which was absorbed within Hindu pantheons was conceived as Ugra-Tara or Ekajata. The Saraswati is regarded as the white form of Ugra-Tara.⁴¹ Puranic literature such as *Agni Purana*⁴², *Vishnudharmottarapurana*⁴³ generally describes the images of the deity having of four hands. Saraswati is portrayed in *Matsyapurana* with two-hand playing on *Vina* and the form of the deity was described as the consort of Vishnu.⁴⁴ On the other hand, all the other four varieties of goddess Saraswati in Buddhism such as

³⁶ B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early Period), Bina Library, Guwahati, 2003, p. 177.

³⁷ Birendranath Datta, *A Folk Culture of the Goalpara Region of Assam*, Guwahati University, 1994, p. 57.

³⁸ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1972, p. 142.

N.B. Kubera was portrayed in pre- Mauryan texts as the form of one eyed, pot bellied and deformed body (*Ku-tanu*) that looks an ugly one. Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika books, Delhi, 2007, p. 51.

³⁹ The image of Kubera that found in Assam is assigned about the 9th century. On a block of granite, fat and pot bellied image seated in *maharajlila*. The god has his right hand stretched over his raised right knee and holding a bag (of wealth).the emblem in left hand cannot be recognized. The bag of wealth and the fat and pot- bellied appearance may identify the god as Kubera. H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, p. 415.

⁴⁰ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, *op.cit.*, pp. 349-350.

⁴¹ Biswanarayan Sastri, 'Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, xxxii, p. 4.

⁴² *Agni Purana* (ch.49) portrayed the goddess Sarswati in a manner who bear manuscript, rosary and *vina* in her four hands (*pustakshamalika-hasta vinahasta Saraswati*), the last apparently held by two normal hands. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p. 381.

⁴³ In *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, Saraswati is describes as manuscripts and rosary in two right hands and lyre and water pot in two left. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 381.

⁴⁴ *Matshya Purana*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 380.

Vajravinasaraswati, Vajrasarada, Aryasaraswati, and *Vajra* Saraswati have been described as the deities of two-handed.⁴⁵ There are some images that are found in Assam are mostly of two-handed Saraswati.⁴⁶ It is due to the dearth of source material it cannot be ascertained in which religious tenets originally the deity was attached to in the region. However, there are two handed images of Saraswati found at Kamakhya which was a Tantric Buddhist center.

Tara, the Buddhist deity which had been associated in the land by the Buddhist groups, considerably influenced the religious system in Assam. There is a temple at Guwahati (Ujanbazar), where Ugratara is worshipped. It is believed that Ratnapala or his successor Indrapala built the present Ugratara temple in Guwahati, after the introduction of worship of Ekjata⁴⁷ by Nagarjuna.⁴⁸ Biswanarayan Sastri believes that the deity of the NilaThan at Gharamara in North Lakhimpur derives from Nila Tara.⁴⁹ The Buddhist deity Kurukilla is worshipped as a Brahmanical deity Kurukulla that is mentioned in *Yoginitantra*.⁵⁰ The goddess Mahamaya is also connected with Mahayana form of Buddhism. Hevajra takes the name of Mahamaya when his Sakti i.e. Buddha *Dakini* embraces him.⁵¹ Some Scholar connects the Mahamaya temple at Dobaka with the context of Tantric form of Buddhism.⁵²

Mahayana and Tantric form of Buddhism contributed to develop some crypto-Buddhist practices in Assam. Sankardeva in his *Kirtana*, mentions that all people are influenced by *Bamanaya niti* that non-vedic rites which is indication of

⁴⁵ Vajravina Saraswati look to have an interesting iconographical composition that she is a two armed deity and “carries in her hands the *vina*, a kind of string musical instrument and plays upon it. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., pp. 349-350.

⁴⁶ One Saraswati image that preserved in the State Museum was discovered from Uzanbazar area of greater Guwahati. It was the product of 9th Century C.E. This figure of Saraswati is believed apparently detached from the stela of an image of Vishnu. H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., p. 381.

⁴⁷ Buddhist goddess Tara, entered into Hindu fold as Ugratara. Ugratara is generally identified with Tikshnakanta and Ekjata of the Buddhist pantheon. Biswanarayan Sastri, ‘Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam’, *J.A.R.S.*, xxxii, p. 4; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 63.

⁴⁸ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, op.cit., p. 341.

⁴⁹ Biswanarayan Sastri in ‘Some aspects of Sakticism in Assam’, op.cit., p. 4.

⁵⁰ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 14; Suren Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, op.cit., p. 67.

⁵¹ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 163.

⁵² R.M. Nath, ‘Antiquities of the Kapili and Jamuna valley’, *J.A.R.S.*, vol.1, 1937, no.1 & 2, p. 46.

the prevalence of some crypto- Buddhist sect at that period.⁵³ One such crypto-Buddhist practice is *Dharma* cult that found expression both in Hinduism and Buddhism.⁵⁴ It was developed out of the assimilation between later form of Buddhism and Hinduism.⁵⁵ The prevalence of *Dharma* cult in the region during the period of Sankardeva (1449-1568 C.E) is also found in the neo-vaishnavite literature. *Guru-Carita-Katha* or the old biography of Vaishnava saints of Assam, mentions that Ananta Kandali was a devotee of Dharma cult, prior to being a disciple of Sankardeva where Dharma represented in the form of a bull.⁵⁶

There are traces of *Dharma* cult that celebrates on the *Caitra-Sankranti* (mid-April) in the Mangaldai sub-division of the Darrang district of Assam, in the form of *Del* or *Deol*.⁵⁷ In many places, Dharma is worshipped in stone image of a tortoise, roughly triangular and rectangular, with its head and four feet slightly protrude.⁵⁸ The region, Mayong (Morigaon district) is still famous for magic and the *tantras*. There is a hillock known as Kashasila (tortoise stone) because there is a flat stone of the shape of tortoise at the northern side of a hillock. According to tradition, many Tibetan monks visited the site and performed Tantric practices. Dharma is also regarded as the part of the worship of Manasa worship.⁵⁹ Manasa poets of Assam⁶⁰ Durgavara, Mankar Sukavi Narayandev, refer Dharma as follows:

‘*Dharma puja laonagini sange laiya*

Asta nage lao puja mandape basiiya’

‘O *Dharma*, take our offerings in company of the *Naginis*. May also the eight *Nagas* accept the offerings in the *mandapa*.’⁶¹

⁵³ Sarbeswar Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, Asami prakasshan, Nagaon, 1988, p. 85.

⁵⁴ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1987, p. 341.

⁵⁵ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1949 reprint 1995 Calcutta, Firma KLM, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Upendra Chandra Lakharu (ed.), *Katha Guru Charitra*, Dutta Barua, Guwahati (5th edn.), 2006, p. 32; Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, op.cit., p. 18.

⁵⁷ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, op.cit., p. 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20; D.N. Jha, *Early India*, op.cit., p. 206.

⁵⁹ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, op.cit., p. 18.

⁶⁰ The poets namely Durgavara, Mankar, Sukavi Narayandev (15th-16th century C.E.) composed poems on Manasa. They are known as Manasa poets of Assam.

⁶¹ For details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, pp. 16-17; S.C. Goswami, ‘Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam’, *I.H.Q.*, 1927, no.1, vol.iii, p. 752.

It is to mention here that there are many points of differences than there are of identification between the worship of Dharma in Assam and the west Bengal.⁶² However, there are various theories propounded by scholars regarding the origin of Manasa (the deity associated with snake) whether they are of Hindus or Buddhist origin.⁶³ The serpent cult has been prevalent in India in a widespread manner in all ages. It appears in the *Vedas*, *Mahabharata* and *Puranas* along with Buddhist literature. The *Nagas* (snake) played a very prominent role in Buddhist religion. There was a close relationship between the Naga cult and Buddhism. The legends about the Buddha and Nagas play prominent part in the Buddhist literature.⁶⁴ The association of Naga cult with Buddhist practices is also narrated in the *Lalitavistara* and the *Mahavastu*. In Buddhism we find Naga cult particularly to the serpents as guardians of trees.⁶⁵ The popular Buddhism related to snake cult and many legends are available in Buddhist writings.⁶⁶ The Mahayana Buddhist considered *Janguli* as snake goddess. *Janguli Tara* is a Tantric form of white Tara, who is considered as the dispeller of poisonous snake and cures the snakebites. There are several names of the deity represented Manasa namely, Bhogabati and Bisahari etc.⁶⁷ The worship of snake goddess Manasa is very popular in Assam particularly in the present districts of Kamarup, Goalpara and Darrang where Buddhist Tantricism considerably developed. In western Assam, all classes of people irrespective of Brahmanas or Candalas, worship Manasa, Visahari or Padmavati.

Manasa became a pantheon of Brahmanical religious system in Bengal during the early phase of the Pala rule.⁶⁸ This Manasa cult is said to have spread in

⁶² Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, pp.19-20

⁶³ It is a well known fact that Naga cult was known in India from early times. According to legends found in *Mahabhamasa*, Kashmira-Gandhara region was an important centre of Naga cult. The presence of serpent worship in the North West is also found in Kharoshi Inscription. Sarita Khettry, 'Buddhism and Contemporary Religions of the North-West: Syncretism, Assimilation and Conflict (c. First century B.C. –c. fifth century A.D.)', *op.cit.*, pp. 75-77.

⁶⁴ In *Mahavamsa* (pp. 82-83) the legends are of Naga cult was associated with Kashmira Gandhara region. As cited Sarita Khettry, 'Buddhism and Contemporary Religions of the North-West: Syncretism, Assimilation and Conflict (c. first century B.C. –c. fifth Century A.D.)', *op.cit.*, p. 75.

⁶⁵ Senart (ed.), *Mahavaastu*, Paris, 1882-97, vol.II. 265-400; R.L. Mitra, *Lalitavistara*, Calcutta, 1881, pp. 281-285 as cited, *ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁶ Satyendranath Goswami, 'Snake Worship: Goddess Manasa Cult in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.xxv, 1979-80, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Birendranath Datta, *A Folk Culture of the Goalpara Region of Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

⁶⁸ D.N. Jha, *Early India*, *op.cit.*, p. 205.

Assam from Bengal after the Muslim invasion of Kamrupa in the 13th century.⁶⁹ However, in Assam, the tradition of Manasa has been encouraging both visual and performing art forms.⁷⁰ The legends of goddess Manasa and her association with the stories of merchant Chando and Beula –Lakhindar are narrated in the literary works of the poets like Mankar, Durgavar and Narayandev.⁷¹

The notion of propitiating powers causing disease and ultimately death seems to have its origin in primitive animism. Such protective powers also developed with Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism.⁷² Hariti was originally Yakshi, a personification of small pox and thus a devourer of children.⁷³ Sitala supposed to have been derived from the Buddhist deity Hariti. Hariti occupies an important position and in Buddhist temples in Nepal. Offerings to Hariti consist of fish, blood of animals, and meat along with other articles.⁷⁴ The deity Ai is attached to Assamese culture as goddess of pox. There are numbers of places particularly the place in Lakhimpur, Phulbari-nagar, on the bank of the river Pichala, which is mentioned as especially sacred to Ai.⁷⁵ It is to mention here that the image of Hariti is found in the region.

Buddhist rites and practices influenced the culture of the region. One of them is *Sonaray* worship, usually described as a tiger deity that is widely popular particularly in Goalpara area. Khan Amanatullah Ahmed is of the opinion that Sonaray and Ruparay were two religious reformers at the time of the beginning of Muslim rule or even before that. According to him, Sonaray was devotee of Buddha in the form of *Dharma*.⁷⁶ *Sonaray geet* (songs of Sonaray) generally prevailed in Pabna district and there are similarity to seasonal festival prevailed in Kamarupa

⁶⁹ For details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.* p. 45; Satyendranath Goswami 'Snake worship: Goddess Manasa cult in Assam', *op.cit.*, pp. 28-32.

⁷⁰ S.N. Sarma, *Asamiya Sahityas Samikratmak Itivrtta* as cited in Malini Goswami, 'Saktism and Applied Art Forms of Assam, J.A.R.S., vol.xxxvi, nos. 1 & 2, 1997, p. 72.

⁷¹ Malini Goswami, 'Saktism and Applied Art Forms of Assam, *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁷² Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, p. 43

⁷³ Sarita Khetry, 'Buddhism and Conemporary Religions of the North-West: Syncretism, Assimilation and Conflict (c.first century B.C. –c. fifth Century A.D.)' *op.cit.*,p.75.

⁷⁴ Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65- 66

⁷⁶ Khan Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch Biharer Itihas*, part I, p. 60. As referred in Birendranath Datta, *A Folk Culture of the Goalpara Region of Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

Maho-hou that prevailed in Kamarupa.⁷⁷ Thus, the late forms of Buddhist practices exert influence in the cultural trends of Assam.

Belief and practice on magic and tantra has considerable influence on the behavioural pattern of people in the region. Tantric culture that initially spread by Buddhist in the region became indispensable part of Assamese life and accordingly, Kamarupa is known throughout India as land of *tantras* and *mantras*.⁷⁸ The vast mass of writings in early Assamese is known as mantra, which mark the distinct stamp of Vajrayana tenets and B.K. Barua believes that most of these mantras bear the impression of the Buddhistic *Dharani* Suttas.⁷⁹ The use of some words such as Dharani in tantra practice and the words Dharani' or 'mandala' that is found in the Sakta literature of medieval period of Assam are the consequences of the influence of Tantric Buddhists practices.⁸⁰

Buddhism contributed to the tradition of healing and cures of ailment in the region. Buddhism seems to have developed a positive attitude to medical profession and healers. Buddha used the knowledge of *Dharma* to heal the illness that arose from the three poisons: greed, anger, and ignorance.⁸¹ Apart from the superficial symptoms of suffering, physical ailments is not neglected in Buddhism. It has been mentioned in Buddhist Pali literature *Majjhimaniaya* that one finds difficult to reach enlightenment with an impaired body.⁸² Accordingly, in the passage of time, Buddhists had developed a variety of formulas to cure both physical and mental illness. Tantric Buddhists exerted considerable influence in the tradition of healings. When in India the Brahmanic formal education in eleventh-century was exclusively theological,⁸³ Buddhist in India developed its tantrism that attached with the proto-scientific investigation on nature. Accordingly, they formulated variety of formulas

⁷⁷ Nabin Chandra Sarma, *Asomiya Lok-Sanskritir Abash*, Bani Prakash, fourth edition Guwahati, 2010, p. 328.

⁷⁸ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

⁷⁹ B.K. Barua, *History of Assamese literature*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1964, p. 188.

⁸⁰ Maheswar Neog, *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, Candra Prakash, Guwahati, 1962, pp. 33 & 37; B. Datta, *A Folk Culture of the Goalpara Region of Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

⁸¹ Buddha emphasizes the right view, practice of right action and right mediation as an indispensable method to obtain freedom from the sufferings.

⁸² David W. Evans (trans.), *The Discourses of Gotama Buddha: Middle Collection*, Janus Publishing Company, London, 1992.

⁸³ Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol.I, Penguin Books, 1966, pp. 253-54.

for healing of ailment, including medicine. The tantric who also acted as physician⁸⁴ or *Vidyadhara*, undertook variety of formulas such specific rituals, practices, etc. along with medicines as a part of their curative measures for ailment.⁸⁵ Though those beliefs and practices are not derived from the conceptual framework of modern science,⁸⁶ but it played a significant role in the early and early medieval society.

As Assam was under the influence of Vajrayana, these practices also influenced the tradition of healings.⁸⁷ Mahayana Buddhists believe the protective power of various Bodhisattvas, Tara, Hariti and Manjusri which flourished in the region. The traditional treatment of snake bites, small pox etc. still prevails in the region due to the continuance of the Buddhist medicinal practices.⁸⁸ There are innumerable *mantraputhis* (books on magical charms) found in the region. They are composed in mystic words and syllables containing magic formulae against snake bite, demons, evil doers, etc, and various spells for healing of diseases and winning of good fortune and desired ends are also mentioned in these writings. For the treatment of diseases, the incantation (*mantra*) may broadly be divided into four categories; *Dharani- mantra*, *Karati mantra*, *Birajara mantra* *Vyadhir mantra*.⁸⁹ Among the various mantras that prevailed in the society of Kamarupa, *Gu-Karati*, is

⁸⁴ R.S. Sharma, 'Material milieu of tantricism', *idem.*, (ed.), *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, second edition, 1984, p. 175

⁸⁵ M.M. Gopinath Kaviraj has dealt in detail on the science of Mantra. For details, see Gopinath Kaviraj, *Bharatiya Sanskriti aur Sadhana*, vol. I & II, Bihar Rastrabhasa Parishad, Patna, 1996.

⁸⁶ Buddhist science is characterized by widely known and used contemplative and introspective methods' of scientific investigation, its application of extra-sensory perception as one of the means of scientific verification, the difficulty of demonstrating the knowledge acquired by contemplative means, and by its goal of progress towards, not unprecedented knowledge, but knowledge previously acquired by Buddha Sakyamuni and other Buddhist contemplatives.

⁸⁷ K. L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.ii, no.2, 1934, p. 48.

⁸⁸ In north India, the god of smallpox is known as Sitala which seems derived from Buddhist Hariti. It is to mention here that the image of Hariti is found in the region. The deity Ai attached to Assamese culture as goddess of pox. The Mahayana Buddhist considered *Janguli* as snake goddess. *Janguli Tara* is a Tantric form of white Tara, who is considered as the dispeller of poisonous snake and cures the snakebites. For details, see Maheswar Neog *Religions of the North-East*, *op.cit.*, pp. 59-60; S.B. Dasgupta, *Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, University of Calcutta, 1950, p. 82; Satyendranath Goswami, 'Snake worship: Goddess Manasa cult in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxv, 1979-80, p. 27.

⁸⁹ The *dharani-mantra*, *karati mantra*, *Birajara mantra* *Vyadhir mantra* are used in the treatment of snake bite, in diseases generally accompanied by pain and allied ailments, in driving out evil spirit and other disease respectively. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 308,

a collection of mantras to ward off charms that was practiced by tantric Buddhists.⁹⁰ The frequent use of the term *Dharanis* in the mantra is the consequences of the influence of Tantric Buddhists practices as the word is derived from Buddhist *Dharani Suttas*.⁹¹ Some higher Yuga Tantra such as *Annuttarat Tantra* and *Kalacakratantra* which contain rich tradition of medical cure⁹² also prevailed in early Kamarupa.⁹³ These practices were developed with the interactions with traditional practices of different areas. Nagarjuna is one noted Buddhist Siddha, author of *Yogasataka*, a work on medicine, is also associated with Assam.⁹⁴ Arurvedic practitioners of Assam have been using some medicines from early times and certain medical pills that is known as *Nagarjuna badi* for instance used in stomach –trouble still in use in Assam, related with his name being prepared according to the prescription of Nagarjuna.⁹⁵ Tibetan medicine is considered as the oldest surviving medical tradition⁹⁶ and Buddhist from that land was culturally attached with this region.

Thus, the Buddhist had influenced the traditional healing process in early Assam. However, these proto-scientific activities lacked their institutional support and the practitioners generally kept in secret all these formula. With the development of neo-Brahmanical trends after first the lineage of Salastambha dynasty, Tantric practices penetrated to Hinduism.⁹⁷ This assimilation creates complexity to distinguish distinctly Buddhist healing tradition from the traditional system of medicine in Assam.

Many elements of Buddhist practices are also absorbed in neo Vaisnavism despite neo Vaisnavite writers were quite critical of prevailing form of Buddhism in Assam. K.L. Barua says ‘Buddhist teachings and customs which must have been

⁹⁰ K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, L BS, Guwahati, 1960, p. 217.

⁹¹ B.K. Barua, *History of Assamese literature*, Sahitya academy, New Delhi, 1964, p. 188; Maheswar Neog, *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, Candra Prakash, Guwahati, 1962, pp. 33-37.

⁹² Biswanath Banerjee (ed.), *A Critical Edition of Sri Kalacakratantra (Collated with the Tibetan Version)*, Biblioteca Indica Series, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1985, p. 311.

⁹³ The Sahajiya Siddhas that associate with Assam such as Saraha and Nagarjuna performed all higher yuga tantra; Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, op.cit., p. 14.

⁹⁴ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., p. 296.

⁹⁵ K. L. Barua, ‘Kamarupa and Vajrayana’, *J.A.R.S.*, no.2, 1934, p. 48.

⁹⁶ L. Rapgay, *Tibetan Medicine-A Holistic Approach to Better Health*, Dharamsala, 1985.

⁹⁷ Tantric *Anji* sign is found expression in the commencement of the inscription of Vanamala varman 12 (83 C.E. -855 C.E.) onwards. Dimmeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, op.cit., pp. 148-149.

widely prevalent in Kamarupa prior to the sixteenth century, persisted even after Sankar's creed had been widely diffused'⁹⁸.

Some unique features of Kamarupa vaisnavism like *satra*, *namghar* and the *saran*, which are not found in other parts of India, are the influence of Buddhist ideas.⁹⁹ The *satra* (center of Vaisnavite saints) is a democratic institution of neo Vaisnavism which came to existence after the demise of Sankardeva, modeled on Buddhist Viharas. The spiritual head of *satra* is known as *adhikarin*. In most of the *satras* spiritual head or *adhikarin* is usually a celibate along with the *bhakats* (monk of neo Vainavite sect in Assam) residing in the *satra*. In earlier days these *bhakats* lived on alms.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the features such as celibacy, living on alms, leadership of an erudite monk and control and democratic ideas of Buddhist monastery influenced the neo Vaisnavite *satra* institution of Assam.¹⁰¹ The *namaghar* (hall for congregational prayers) is an essential feature of neo Vaisnavism that is attached to the Assamese culture where everyone without any distinction of caste can pray. The *Namghar* is covered by a round roof that called *tup*, derived from Buddha stupa.¹⁰²

The word *sarana* is used to denote initiation of a neophyte in the Assamese Vaisnava tenet similar to the initiation of a Buddhist.¹⁰³ As regards the *Sarana*, the Kamarupa school of neo vaisnavism recognized four types, viz. *Harita sarana*, *Namata sarana*, *Guruta sarana* and *Bhakta sarana*, i.e. One must take refuge in God, prayer or teaching, preceptor or teacher and Bhakata or order. Except Haita sarana or refuge in God, other three are exactly identical with Buddhism.¹⁰⁴ *Sahajiya* Buddhism adopted the doctrine of complete surrender to guru (preceptor).

⁹⁸ K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, op.cit., p. 211.

⁹⁹ S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', *I.H.Q.*, 1927, no.1, vol.iii, p. 753.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 753; K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, op.cit., p. 211.

¹⁰¹ For details, see S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', p. 753; S. Sasananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, Bahri Publication, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 158-159.

¹⁰² For details, see S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', op.cit., p. 753; S. Sasananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, pp. 158-159 and K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, op.cit., p. 211.

¹⁰³ K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, op.cit., p. 211; Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ The famous Triratna or three jewels of Buddhism are refuge to Buddha (teacher), Dharma (teaching), Sangha (order). However Sahajayana and Tibetan form of added a refuge to Guru. S. Sasananda, *Buddhism in Assam*, op.cit., p. 158; S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', op.cit., p. 754; K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, op.cit., p. 211; Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 96.

The same spirit of *Guruvada* (stress laid to the devotion to Guru) found expression in later development of religious school led by Sankardeva in successive period.¹⁰⁵

It has been said that the branches or Samhati of in the neo Vaisnavism in Kamarupa are *Brahma samhati*, *Purusha samhati*, *Nikaya samhati*, *Kala samhati* may compare with different Buddhist sectarian divisions such as, Hinayana, Maahayana, Vajrayana and Kalacakrayana of Buddhism.¹⁰⁶ It is important to mention further that Kalasamhati is a faction of neo-Vaisnavism, led by Gopal-ata which faction has been practicing esoteric ceremonies similar to the Kalacakratantra.¹⁰⁷

There is a religious practice that is known as *Ratikhowa* or *Bhitar Seva* which is similar to the practices of *Kalacakraraj tantra*, a *tantra* of Buddhist origin.¹⁰⁸ This practice is attached with the Mishing society which they believed as the part of *Kalasamhati*.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the practices that are associated with neo-Vaisnavism, such as *Ratikhowa* (eaters of night), *Purna bhuga* (enjoyers to the full), *Tamul nokhowa* (non-eaters of betel nut) are a mixture of tantric Buddhism and tribal customs.¹¹⁰

Pranav Jyoti Deka also opines the basic philosophy of neo-Vaisnavism propagated by Sankardeva was based on the philosophy of *Nam-Dharma* which was

¹⁰⁵ Among the factions that arose in neo-vaisnavism, after Sankardeva, one is known as *Kala-Samhati*. It was led by Gopala Ata who lays stress on *Guru (preceptor)* and considered *Guru as the* representative of god. Like Kalacakrayana, this section has been practicing esoteric ceremonies. *Kala Samhati Satras* was most liberal in admitting disciples from all communities including tribesman. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, op.cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁰⁶ P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, third edition (revised) 1987, p. 413; S. Sasanananda, *Buddhism in Assam, op.cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁷ Gopal-ata preached the doctrine from Kalajhar of Barpeta subdivision, who stressed the Guru and considered him as human representative of God. This Kalasamhati Satra was most liberal in admitting disciples from all communities including tribesmen. For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, vol.iii, op.cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁰⁸ It is said that a neophyte had to resist his temptations in the midst of meat, drink and a naked young woman. The ordinary common people may not have been the votaries of such cult. For details, see R.M. Nath, 'Sankardeva and the Vaisnava movement in Assam,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, *op.cit.*, p. 209; Biswanarayan Sastri, 'A neglected source for materials for the History of Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.xxviii, 1984-85, p.101; K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa, op.cit.*, p. 203.

¹⁰⁹ For details, see Jatindra Kumar Borgohain, *Asamar Sanskritik Itihas*, vol.1, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 2007, pp. 204-205.

¹¹⁰ R.M. Nath, *Sankardeva and the Vaisnava movement in Assam, The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta, second edition, 1956, p. 209.

influenced by the Buddhist *Kriya Tantra*. According to *Nam-Dharma* one attains salvation and escape the circle of rebirth by the constant repetition of the name of the lord (*Hari-nama*). It is a modified form of ‘*Namdhari*’ and ‘*Nembustu*’ cult generated by Boudha *Kriya Tantra*.¹¹¹

Some customs of Tibetan form of Buddhism influenced the cultural life of south Kamarup and Darrang district of Assam as there was linkage through Bhutan to Tibet.¹¹² The mask-bearing dance, which is associated with Tibetan Lamaistic tradition, found expression in the traditional art form in Kamarupa that is known as *Kamrupi-Dhuliya*.¹¹³ Similar with the custom of preserving butter in the granary at *Math*, (monastery) there is granary of oil in Barpeta Satra.¹¹⁴ *Bhor-Taal* (large Cymbals) which has been an essential ingredients of the indigenous music paraphernalia of Assam, basically comes from Tibet (*Bhortal*, *Bhota-Tala*).¹¹⁵ It is to mention here that *Buddha Purnima* as a festival is observed in all the temples of Kamarupa besides other festival.¹¹⁶

Besides these practices, Buddhism had a great impact on the philosophic temperament of the region. The tantric Buddhist philosophy¹¹⁷ reflects on the most important deity of the region, i.e. Kamakhya. The root of the philosophy of the deity *Kamakhya– Kameswari* lies in the Boudha void (*Sunyata*).¹¹⁸ The emotion of

¹¹¹ Buddhist *kriya tantra* accepted the magic value of the name. The cult was propounded in China by Seico (766-822 C.E.). This is known in Japan as Nembustu where ‘salute to Amitabha Buddha’ has to repeat constantly. For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 72 & 96.

¹¹² Pranab jyoti Deka, ‘Mahapurusia Dharmat Baudha Prabhab’ *Gariyashi*, 5th issue, vol.I, 1997. Sahitya Prakash, Tribune Building, Guwahati, p. 32.

¹¹³ Kamarupi Dhuliya is a popular folk tradition particularly in lower Assam area having the features of semi-drama, song, and musical instruments. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 423.

¹¹⁴ Pranab jyoti Deka, ‘Mahapurusia Dharmat Baudha Prabhab’ *op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹¹⁵ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 423.

¹¹⁶ Gajendra Adhikary, *History of the Temples of Kamrupa*, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 2001, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ The chief aim of the Tantric form of Buddhism is to reach the state of non-duality by destroying all principles of dualism. Mahayana Buddhist holds *Prajna* as the perfect knowledge and *Upaya* as the universal compassion and the union between the two leads to the Buddhicitta. In Tantric form of Buddhism, these *Prajna* and *Upaya* are no more abstract principles, but are concrete male and female entities. Gayatri Sen Majumdar, “Buddhism in Ancient Bengal”, *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, vol. xiii, 1977-78, pp. 248-249.

¹¹⁸ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-43.

supreme love in Vaisnava School is derived from the *Sahajiya* school of Buddhism.¹¹⁹ The religious value with the courtship with woman developed divine love i.e. idea of *Parakiya* that is reflected in Vaisnavism led by Caitanya.¹²⁰ The folk songs of love prevailed in Goalpara region which reflect the *parakia* love between Radha and Krishna are borrowed from Bengal Vaisnavism.¹²¹

The Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas composed *Caryapadas* in the vernacular that can immediately intelligible by the common man. The *Caryapadas* are first literary documents of the philosophic speculation that developed and spread in the region.¹²² These *Caryapadas* are not entirely attached with any philosophical school namely *Madhyamika* or Vedanta rather represent a Special school of religious thought of early medieval period of Eastern India.¹²³

There are some words or simile and the philosophic speculation that are related to Buddhism such as Dharma,¹²⁴ Tathagata,¹²⁵ Sakya¹²⁶ and these were expressed in the royal epigraphs in different periods. It indicates the influence of

¹¹⁹ *Mahasukha* of Buddhist *sahajjya* was not a purely physiological sensation –there was a psychological element involved in it. The Vaisnava Sahajiya cult based primarily on the divination of the sex-emotion; by both the physiological and psychological discipline. For details see, S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

¹²⁰ G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, Oxford University Press, London, 1938, reprint 2009 Delhi, p. 349.

¹²¹ Birendranath Datta, *A Study of the Folk Culture of the Goalpara Region of Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

¹²² There are debates among the scholars regarding the date of composition of the *Caryapadas*. In 1907 M.M. Haraprasad Sastri had discovered the original palm-leaf manuscript of the *Caryapada* at the royal court of Nepal consisting collection of 47 Padas (verses) along with a Sanskrit commentary. It was published by *Bangiya Sahitya Parisad*, as a part of '*Hajar Bacharer Purano Bangala Bhasay Baudhdhagan O Doha*' in 1916. In Succeeding Period P.C. Bagchi and Rahul Sankrityayan discovered more *Caryapadas* composed by Sarahapada, Kanhapada and Tilopada. All the *Caryas* represents same school of thought and belongs to same literary school. Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2009, p. 54.

N.B. According to Buddhist tradition, among the eighty-four Siddha Acaryas, twenty-three Siddhas composed the *Carya* songs.

¹²³ S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, p. 50.

¹²⁴ Nidhanpur Copper Plate (c.620C.E.-643C.E.) verse-3, lines 4-5, Puspabhadra Copper Plate Grant of Dharmapala (first half of 12th century C.E.) verse7; Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, *op.cit.*, p. 161; M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

¹²⁵ In the 51th line of Guwahati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapala (c1058 C.E.) refers "Uttarena Tathagatakaritaditya bhattaraka Satkasasanabhabisabhusimni khetralisthasakhotakbrisha..." 'On the north, there is a Sakhotaka tree on the embankment of the cultivable land lying on the boundary of bhavisa land given as grant to Aditya Bhattaraka by Tathagata'; Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

¹²⁶ The comparison of the person holder of high quality with Sakya is found in Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription (v.18) of Dharmapala (12th century C.E.). M.M. Sharma *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.* p. 247.

Buddhism to some extent in the contemporary thought in Assam. K.L. Barua believes the reference of *Dharma* in Nidhanpur Copper Plate¹²⁷ as the clear reference to the law of Buddha.¹²⁸ The word “*Dharma*’ also occurs in the Puspabhadra Copper Plate Grant of Dharmapala (first half of 12th century C.E.).¹²⁹ K.L.Barua says that the *Dharma* in this inscription indicates the influence of the Sahajiya dharama or Vajrayana philosophy upon Dharmapala.¹³⁰ ‘*Dharma*’ in Nidhanpur was transformed to perennial source of pleasure in days of Dharmapala as a part of *Mahasukha* conception of Vajrayana philosophy. However, Mahaswar Neog links the word ‘*Dharma*’ of this inscription with ‘*Dharma Puja*’.¹³¹ King Indrapala also assumed the title ‘*Prajna-Badhu Ballabha*’.¹³²

Tantric Buddhist Siddhas contributed to the spread of education to the land side by side with the Brahmanical system of education. The study of tantra introduced in monastic universities, especially at Nalanda. Outside the universities, the Mahasiddhas transmitted Buddhist tantric doctrine and education in Kamarupa that catered to the people outside the *Varna* system. As formal education of Assam, could not touch the mass, Tantric system of education became influential in the land

¹²⁷ “*Vimuktam Parameswarashya Rupam Nijamurtibibhusitam Jayati.*
Jayati jagadeka bandhu Lukadvita
Jayshya sampadahetu parahitamurtirhastaphalalumeyasthiti dharma dhatri
muchsiskshispu”

‘Victory to *Dharma*, which is the sole friend of the world, which is the cause of the riches of both the worlds, which is the benevolent (causes of welfare to others) and invisible, yet whose existence can be inferred from the results accruing from its actions; D. Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, op.cit., p. 161.

¹²⁸ K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, op.cit., p. 97.

¹²⁹ ‘*Hey bhabinu nripatayu prayena yasna sridharmapalanripate srinute*
Ti juyam yidyuchatchapala rajyamrisavi
Ma nah tyajya kadachidapi
Nityasukhu na dharma’

‘O future kings, please listen with love to this request of king Dharmapala that you should give up your false vanity because of (possessing) the kingdom, as transitory as the steak of lighting, but should never give-up *Dharma*, which is perennial source of pleasure.’ Puspabhadra copper plate Grant of Dharmapala (first half of 12th century C.E.) verse7, M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 263.

¹³⁰ K. L. Baruah, *Early History of Kamrupa*, op.cit., pp. 91-92.

¹³¹ Maheswar Neog ‘The worship of *Dharma Puja* in Assam, with notice of lyrics used in the ritual.’ the journal of the Asiatic society, letters, Calcutta, vol.xvii, no.3, 1951, as cited M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 67-68.

¹³² M.M. Sharma, *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., p. 205.

till 15th century C.E.¹³³ Thus, Kamarupa was recognized as one of the important centers of learning of Tantra in the eastern India.¹³⁴ The works attributed to Minnatha such as *Kaulajnananirnaya*, *Akulviratantra* and *Kamakhyahisiddhi* were widely studied in Kamarupa.¹³⁵

Buddhism has also their deep influence in the growth and development of language and literature in Assam through the *Caryapadas*. A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which members of a social group cooperate and interact.¹³⁶ The *Caryapadas* covers the vast range of the Vajrayani Tantrika literary tradition that arose out of the Mahayana Buddhism.¹³⁷

The language of *Caryageeti* and *Caryapada* which were written by some of the Siddhacharyas was not Sanskrit but the local vernacular.¹³⁸ The language used by the Sahajiya Siddhas mostly from Assam, Bengal and Orissa, representing the latest phase of Magadhi *apabhramsa* and the eastern group of modern Indo-Aryan languages.¹³⁹ Scholars from different regions of India sought to claim the *Carya* – songs as their earliest specimen of literary work. Parikshit Hazarika observes that the language is more close to Assamese language by linguistic survey of *Caryapada*.¹⁴⁰

There are great similarity found in the *Caryas*, composed by Luipada, Sarahapada who hails from the region with the languages used in Assamese of the Vaishnava period.¹⁴¹ Rahula Sankrityana refers to the fact that Minnatha composed a work, namely, *Bahyantara – bodhicitta- bandhopadesha*, in a language that is very much similar to old Assamese.¹⁴²

¹³³ For details, see P. C. Choudhury, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, pp. 231-233.

¹³⁴ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 293.

¹³⁵ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

¹³⁶ E. H. Sturtevant, *An introduction to Linguistic science*, New Haven, 1947, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

¹³⁸ Buddhist Pali language no longer became the language of common people so Popular Mahayana used vernacular language which is the language of common masses.

¹³⁹ B.K. Barua, *History of Assamese literature*, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ Parikshit Hazarika, *CaryaPada*, Dalimi Prakashan, Guwahati, seventh edition, 2007.

¹⁴¹ For details, see *ibid.*; Jatindra Kumar Borgohain, *Asamar Sanskritik Itihas*, vol.1, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 2007, pp. 314-320

¹⁴² B.K. Barua, *History of Assamese literature*, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

There are many linguistic affinities of the language of *Caryapada* with Brajabuli, which was used by pre-vaishnavite and Vaishnavite literatures.¹⁴³ Thus, B.K. Kakati rightly shows that some phonological and morphological traits registered in these songs that have come down in unbroken continuity into the Assamese language.¹⁴⁴

The evolution of the Assamese literature may also be traced back to *Caryapada* or *Caryageeti*. The first instance of written Assamese literature is the *Caryapadas*. The *Caryapadas*, exerted a great influence on the pre-Vaishnava and Vaishnava writings, particularly in *Ankiyanats* and *Bargeets* of Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavadeva.¹⁴⁵ The *Caryapadas* are said to have served as a structural model of the *Bargeets*.¹⁴⁶ The literary style of autobiographical voice that are found in Caryas such as “Saraha says . . . , Kanha observes . . . , Tillopa declares . . . also are used by the neo-Vaishnavite writers in their writings. The Caryas are short poems containing some ten to fourteen lines; meter seems to be the founder of Assamese poetry.¹⁴⁷

The *Caryapadas* not only influenced to the development of language and literature in Assam, but also contributed to the development of song, music in the region. The *Caryapadas* are full of lyricisms and short rhymed poem those were sung as *geet* or song.¹⁴⁸ Some classical *ragas* (melody) such as *Kamod*, *Dhanasrimallar* etc. of *Caryapadas* are also found in *Bargeets* of Sankardeva.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 276.

¹⁴⁴ Banikanta Kakati, *Assamese its Formation and Development*, Lawyers Book Stall Publication, Guwahati, fifth edition, 1995, p. 9; Parikhrit Hazarika, ‘*CaryaPada*, *op.cit.*’, Birinchi Kumar Barua, *History of Assamese literature*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

¹⁴⁶ B.K. Barua, *History of Assamese Literature*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ H. K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, *op.cit.*, p. 281.

¹⁴⁸ These were written in the form of lyrics mainly with a view to publicize the primary rules, regulations, chief customs and traditions of Buddhism; Lalan Prasad Singh, *Buddhist Tantra*, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁴⁹ Classical *ragas* that found in the *Caryapadas* are as follows *Patanjari*, *Baradi*, *Kamod*, *Dhanasri*, *Gunjari*, *Malacigurua*, *Kahnu*, *Mallari*, *Bharabi*, *Ramkari*, *Deshaka* and *Baladi* etc. For details, see Hemendra Nath Datta, ‘Old Kamarupi school of classical music of Assam,’ *J.A.R.S.*, vol.xxxvi, no.1 & 2 1997, published in 2003, pp. 39-44; Parikhrit Hazarika, ‘*CaryaPada*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

Certain musical tradition of Kamarupa such *Ozaha-pali*¹⁵⁰, and devotional musical songs *Pacali*,¹⁵¹ which are continuing till today are influenced by the *ragas* (melody) of *Caryapadas*.¹⁵²

The *Caryapadas*, exerted a great influence on the pre-Vaisnava and Vaisnava writings, particularly in *Ankiya-nats* and *Bargeets* of Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavadeva.¹⁵³ The *Caryapadas* not only influenced the development of language and literature in Assam but also contributed to the development of song, music such as *Borgeet* and *Ozah Pali* in the region. The Metaphors and similes drawn from the day-to-day life of common people found in *Caryapadas* also influenced the '*Deh-Bicharar Geet*'.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the *Caryapadas* of Buddhist mystic poets or *Siddhas* not only add to the literary traditions but they also constitute an invaluable source for the study of Assamese society and can link with the missing part of the historical evolution of Buddhism in Assam.

Some customs of Tibetan form of Buddhism (Lamaism) influenced the cultural life of south Kamarup and Darrang district of Assam.¹⁵⁵ The mask-bearing dance, which is associated with Tibetan Lamaistic tradition, is found expression in the traditional art form in Kamarupa that is known as *Kamrupi-Dhuliya*.¹⁵⁶

IV. Impact on Art and Architecture

Geertz adds a new dimension to the study of art, culture and religion. He does not suggest abandoning the important insights but rather the need to widen the perspective and to accept that religion is essentially a cultural system that gives

¹⁵⁰ There are two musical performances of Ozha pali, viz. *Byah goa* and *Sukanani*, that traced back to the early medieval period. The *Sukanani* form is a product of late medieval period, mostly based on *Padmapurana* and those composed by Sukavi Narayandeva of 17th century C.E. Hemendra Nath Datta, 'Old Kamarupi school of classical music of Assam', *op.cit.*, pp. 39-44; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.iii, *op.cit.*, p. 406.

¹⁵¹ In the sixteen century the poets such as Durgavara, Mankar composed poems in praise of Goddess Manasa. They are known as *pachali*.

¹⁵² H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-iii, *op.cit.* p.406.

¹⁵³ P.C.Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p.226.

¹⁵⁴ H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, *op.cit.* p.282.

¹⁵⁵ Pranabjyoti Deka, 'Mahapurusa Dharmat Baudha Prabhab,' *Gariyashi*, 5th issue, vol-I, Sahitya Prakash, Gowahati, 1997, p.32.

¹⁵⁶ 'Kamrupi dhuliya' is a popular folk tradition particularly in lower Assam area having the features of semi-drama, song, and musical instruments. H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-iii, *op.cit.*, p.423.

meaning to human existence. He defines religion in these terms, implying that it has a universal function to provide such meaning. He writes:

A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.¹⁵⁷

An important aspect of the history of Buddhism in India is its manifestation in art and architecture.¹⁵⁸ Art and design are major aspects of Buddhist practice. As Buddhist ideas spread into new regions they have invariably ignited creative surges and expressions in all aspects of culture.¹⁵⁹ Buddhist art and architecture expressed as stupas, monasteries, temples, the mountain temple, the Buddha image, paintings, and folk art.¹⁶⁰ It is only in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. that we find the Buddhists patronizing craftsmen and employing art for edifying ends. From what has just been said, however, it will be well understood that there had not at this time come into being any truly Buddhist or Brahmanical idealistic art; and thus "Early Buddhist" art was necessarily the popular Brahmanical art and animistic art of the day, adapted to Buddhist requirements. The only exception to this rule is that special phase of I⁵.¹⁶¹ Theravada artists and sculptors of Southeast Asia have portrayed the historical Buddha and events related to his life with that are also represented by various symbols.¹⁶² Symbolism is one of the significance of Buddhist art. Buddhists adopted

¹⁵⁷ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Hutchinson, London, 1975, p. 90.

¹⁵⁸ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 365.

¹⁵⁹ Edward A. Irons and Gordon Melton (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, New York, 2008, p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶¹ Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Buddhist Primitives", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 28, No. 154 (Jan., 1916), pp. 151-155. For other details on Buddhist art and culture, see Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown (eds.), *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures Knowledge, ritual, and art*, Routledge, London, 2009; G. C. Chauley, *Early Buddhist Art in India 300BC – 300AD*, Sandeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 1998; Paul Carus, *Portfolio of Buddhist Art: Historical and Modern*, The Open Court Publication, Chicago, 1906 and Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. For details on the evolution of Buddhist art forms, see Amrendra Kr. Thakur, "Cultural Development in Buddhism of Arunachal Pradesh: Probing Through Arts", the final paper accepted for publication as the proceedings of a seminar on "Pre-Colonial History and Traditions of Arunachal Pradesh: Tawang and West Kameng District", Doimukh, 2012.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 24- 27.

some symbols which were popular during the pre Buddhist period and accorded them new significance in Buddhism.¹⁶³ Some symbols such as *Purnaghata* (full vase), *Svastika*, *nadipada* (bull head), *chakra* (wheel) and animal motifs such as elephant, bull, lion and horse were adopted by the Buddhists.¹⁶⁴ The shift from the symbolic to the iconic representation of the Buddha coincided with the rise of Mahayana and the spread of devotionalism (*bhakti*) at the beginning of the first and second centuries C.E.¹⁶⁵

In the early medieval period, Buddhist art was greatly influenced by Tantricism. Along with the images of Buddhisatvas associated with Mahayana, prominence was given to the Dhyani Buddhas and the divinities associated with various deities.¹⁶⁶ The art forms of Assam are religious in nature, and they are realistic and idealized, spiritual and mystic, symbolic and transcendental.¹⁶⁷ There are no sculptures of Brahmanical religion (Saivism, Vaisnavism and Saktism) found in Assam earlier than 5th-6th century C.E.¹⁶⁸ The earliest specimen of art in the region was contributed by Buddhists in forms of stupas. The votive stupas i.e. small sized stupas of Sri Surya Pahar assigned to early centuries of Common Era were carved out of solid rocks.¹⁶⁹ The structural feature consisting of Anda & Harmika are distinct on the stupas in Suryapahar. The art of excavating caves in hills was an original contribution of the Buddhists¹⁷⁰ Like that there are numbers of caves found in Paglatek (one cave), Yogighopa (five caves) and at Pancaratna, (three caves) and the periods of those caves are assigned about early centuries of the Common Era were used by the Buddhist monks.¹⁷¹

The sculptural art of early Assam is of classical idiom that represented in Surya Pahar and Da-Parvatia. Kamarupa School absorbed stylistic traits from the

¹⁶³ For details, see S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., pp. 365-366.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶⁶ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 375.

¹⁶⁷ P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, third edition (revised), 1987, p. 479.

¹⁶⁸ Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *J.A.R.S.*, vol. xxix, no. 82, 2004-2006, p. 215.

¹⁶⁹ H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., pp. 429-430.

¹⁷⁰ S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, op.cit., p. 368.

¹⁷¹ Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,' op.cit., p. 208.

Gupta idiom and later received from Pala style.¹⁷² The art of Assam is generally influenced by schools of eastern India, Bihar and Bengal and Orissa, particularly it has the Pala characteristics mark on the most of the works of art.¹⁷³

It is to mention here that Buddhism exerted great contribution to the development of the Pala schools of art in India.¹⁷⁴ It was during the 10th -12th century C.E., Assam witnessed the birth of a mature phase of artistic activities though here too it was the style of eastern Indian which was instrumental. Though the fine arts of Assam is fundamentally based on the Indian traditional system, but on most occasions Assamese art exhibits the marked uniqueness with indigenous influences.¹⁷⁵ It is due to the birth of different deities resulted by Vajrayana's imaginative contemplation that various art forms were also developed. Various figures became a part of popular imagination, and thus, portrayed in paintings, sculptures and various other forms of arts and culture. The provincial character in Assamese art reflected in the horrid figures of Bhairava and Chamunda; Mongoloid ethnic peculiarities reflecting those figures having high, cheek bones and flat noses. It is the first instances of arising out of the tradition Indian and indigenous local conceptions.¹⁷⁶ A popular image of Tantric Buddhism Chunda, occurs in Narakasura finds which must have been made by Indigenous artists.¹⁷⁷

Tantric form of Buddhism developed a cultural zone in the region including Tibet, Bengal, Nepal and Bihar etc. Accordingly, various schools of art freely displayed their artistic skill. It has been mentioned in the second chapter of the thesis that few images of Buddha and related deities are found in Assam that display various artistic style similar to those of other parts of India and that of Tibet. The images of Buddha found in Assam have the Tibetan features in dress. Tibetan art also found expression in the gate of Tara temple at Kamakhya. The statues and the

¹⁷² H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., vol.iii, p. 367.

¹⁷³ Some art of Ghatsal in Nagaon are from Pala School of art. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve century A.D.*, op.cit., pp. 476-477.

¹⁷⁴ Buddhism exerted great contribution to the development of the various schools of art in India, viz. Gandhara, Mathura and Pala A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, op.cit., pp. 201-203

¹⁷⁵ For details, see P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve-Century A.D*, op.cit., p. 478.

¹⁷⁶ B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 225.

¹⁷⁷ H. K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., pp. 421 & 470.

postures that are found in Assam are similar with the different parts of Bengal and Bihar.

Vajrayanist also used various motifs and symbols and the rich heritage symbolism inherited from tantricism are also reflected as art forms in the region.¹⁷⁸ The characteristic features Buddhist art are the *mandalas*, diagrams of a circle enclosing a square. Assam followed the general art tradition and motif of north India.¹⁷⁹ The mystic symbols i.e. circles within circles used by the tantrics found in the ceiling decoration at Tejpur.¹⁸⁰ The tantric- Buddhist art motifs are also found in Dimapur, Kasomari and Sadiya.¹⁸¹ Buddhist art tends to be characterize by a very rich and syncretic Buddhist pantheon. Though the composite cult emblem dated back to Kushana period,¹⁸² but the syncretic behaviour of major cult images viz. Saivism and Saktism, Vaisnavism and Buddhism are found expression with the development of Tantric faith.

The amalgamation between the concept of Buddha and Vishnu is found expression in Brahmaputra valley known as Buddha and Vishnu, popularly known as *Buddha- Janardana* in Sukreswar temple complex assigned to 10th century C.E.¹⁸³ Another important example of the synthesis of Buddhism and Vaisnavism in art form is the statue found at Numaligarh.¹⁸⁴ The syncretic images of Uma-Maheswari and Ardha- Nariswara are found in some places of Assam assigned to 9th and 10th century C.E.¹⁸⁵ was certainly the result of tantric influence. The figure Ardhanariswar found from Malhobari, Nagaon indicates the influence of the Tantric Buddhist faith.¹⁸⁶

There are difference of opinions among the scholars regarding the origin of the motif of Chaitya window and stupas. It has said *Chaitya* window in its origin

¹⁷⁸ The mystic symbols i.e. circles within circles used by the tantrics found in the ceiling decoration at Tejpur, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xxiv, 1924-25, pp. 12-47.

¹⁷⁹ B.K. Baruah, *A cultural History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 224.

¹⁸⁰ *Journal of Asiatic society of Bengal*, vol.xxiv, 1924-25, pp. 12-47.

¹⁸¹ P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the people of Assam to the Twelve century A.D.*, op.cit., p. 450.

¹⁸² Jitendra Nath Benerjee, 'Cult Syncretism', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.iv, op.cit., p. 335.

¹⁸³ H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, op.cit., pp. 344-345 & 392.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-357.

¹⁸⁶ P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelve Century A.D.*, op.cit., p. 464.

represents a shrine, particularly of the Buddhist.¹⁸⁷ Chaitya window pattern occur on many temple ruins of Assam.¹⁸⁸ The Chaitya window patterns also on the doorjambes of Da-Parvatiya. In the words of P.C.Choudhary 'A huge stone architrave from Nij-Borchila from the present Sonitpur district contains three dimensioned bold reliefs of three Buddhist Chaityas with both Bodhi and Nyagrodha trees.'¹⁸⁹ It is suggested that the brick built eight-sided hemisphere dome of the shrine of Umananda was of Buddhist architecture, expressive of eight noble path of nirvana.¹⁹⁰ Assamese Vaisnava *Namghar* (hall for congregational prayers) which is covered by a round roof is called *tup*, to perpetuate the memory of the ancient Buddha stupa.¹⁹¹

V. Influence in tradition: Creation of Brahmanical myths:

Some myths, which occupy indispensable part of Assamese tradition such as Madan- Kamadeva and the origin of the name of Kamarupa seem developed out of Buddhist tradition.¹⁹² The origin of the sacred center at Nilachala and Kamakhya are related to the story of Sati's body and limbs are also connected with Buddhist tradition.¹⁹³ According to Puranic legend, Kamadeva, the god of love Indian cupid was sent by the gods to put an end to Siva's mourning after the death of his consort and to awaken to him again the passion of creation. Kamadeva was burnt to ashes by the angry glance of Siva, but later recovered his original form (*rupa*), hence the

¹⁸⁷ Chaitya pattern is like the shape of lotus leaf or leaf of a papal tree, standing symbolically from Brahma or Siva, and associated with the figure of both Hindu and Buddhist' as cited in P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the twelve century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, pp. 447-448.

¹⁸⁸ The Chaitya window patterns on the jambs show close resemblance to those of the Gupta temples of the same places. Some art of Ghatsal in Nagaon are from Pala School of art P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the twelve century A.D.*, *op.cit.*, pp. 476-477.

¹⁸⁹ P. C. Choudhury, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p. 328.

¹⁹⁰ Gangaram Choudhary, *Sapta Boddhisattvas and Their Sculptural Representations in Assam*, Assam Research Society for Buddhist Studies, Guwahati, p. 8.

¹⁹¹ K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁹² N.B. The attempt of Kama to infatuate Siva is similar with the Buddhist story of infatuate Buddha by Mara. In Buddhism Mara is the deity of death and desire, the symbol of passion and desire and enemy of liberation. He uses all weapons and instructed his three daughters (Tanha, Rati and Raga) to use all arts of seduction on the Buddhistva. With enlightenment, the Buddha overcame his fear of his death and cut off his desires.

¹⁹³ D. C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pihās' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.xiv, no.1, 1948, p. 7.

name of the region known as Kamarupa.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the name of *Kamarupa* associated with Puranic story of Kamadeva.

In Buddhist mythology, Mara is closely associated with the god of desire and love, and identified as the Lord of the realm of Desires, the Kamaloka.¹⁹⁵ The attempt of Kama to infatuate Siva is similar with the Buddhist story of infatuate Buddha by Mara.¹⁹⁶ The term Mara is linked to the Sanskrit root *Mrityu*, meaning death or causes death. *Kamana* or *Kama* (desire) is Mara and Mara is *Mrityu* (death or destruction), Kama is called Mara, because it is the root of all miseries and sufferings.¹⁹⁷ The story developed in *Kalikapurana* much later than the heyday of Buddhist Tantricism in Assam. Biswanarayan Sastri is of the opinion that the legend of Kamadeva related to Kamarupa, developed following the Buddhist mythology.¹⁹⁸

The myth of the origin of the sacred center at Nilachala and Kamakhya, related to the story of Sati's body and limbs is the result of various stages of modification¹⁹⁹ and this story developed further in *Kalikapurana*.²⁰⁰ D.C. Sircar believed that the story of the cutting of Sati's body in this myth might have some connection of with Buddhist.²⁰¹ After the death, of the historical Buddha, the body was cremated, and his remains (fragments of bones and teeth) were allegedly

¹⁹⁴ *Kalikapurana*, ch.44, as cited Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), *Kalikapurana Murtivinirdesha*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, p. xxviii; B.K. Baruah, *A Cultural History of Assam* (early period), *op.cit.*, pp. 15- 16.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Decaroli, *Haunting the Buddha Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press New York, 2004, pp. 115-117.

¹⁹⁶ N. B. In Buddhism Mara is the deity of death and desire, the symbol of passion and desire and enemy of liberation. He uses all weapons and instructed his three daughters (Tanha, Rati and Raga) to use all arts of seduction on the Buddhists. With enlightenment, the Buddha overcame his fear of his death and cut off his desires. It represents some of the psychological conflicts that the religious practitioners encounter.

¹⁹⁷ Raghu Vira, Lokesh chandra, *Kalacakra Tantra and Other Texts*, part-1, International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi, 1966, p.12.

¹⁹⁸ Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), *Kalika purana Murtivinirdesha*, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁹⁹ D. C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, p. 7-11.

²⁰⁰ Mahaswar Neog 'Buddhism in Kamarupa', *I.H Q.*, vol. xxviii, June, 1952, p. 146.

²⁰¹ D. C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas' *op.cit.*, p. 7.

N.B. The legend that associated with limbs of Sati and Sakta Pitha also connect with Tara which was originally a Buddhist pantheon that became Hinduised. Some Sakta centers of (Sakti pithas) in eastern India such as Tarapith in Bhairbhumi district, and another 'seat' (*pitha*) of the goddess Ugra Tara 13 miles north of Barisal, West Bengal. These Sakta centers also developed with similar legend of Kamakhya i.e. dropping of Sati's limbs (Sati's eye and nose respectively dropped in that places). N.K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, Dacca, 1929, pp. 205-6 and plate. Lxxi (a); A. Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition: a case study of West Bengal*, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp.166-7.

'distributed among the nine ruling clans from various regions and Buddhist constructed the stupas in order to enshrine the Buddha's corporal relics.²⁰² Tirthayatra (visiting tirthas sacred places) concept of Hinduism was formed probably under the impact of Buddhism.²⁰³ It is also believed that the conception of *Catuspitha* (four sacred places) mentioned in *Kalikapurana* derives from the Buddhist tradition. *Hevajra Tantra*, the work assigned to the 7th century CE., mentions the four important Vajrayana centers are Kamakhya, Uddiyana, Srihatta, Purnagiri; in the same way the same places are mentioned as Sakta *tirtha* in *Kalikapurana* the work of 10th century Brahmanical work.²⁰⁴ *Kalikapurana* in (68.43-45) comments the four main pithas as Odrapitha, Jalsaila, Purnapitha and Kamarupa.²⁰⁵ *Kalikapurana* connects the sacred places where different parts of the body of Sati fell.²⁰⁶ Buddhists linked various nerve channels (*lalana*, *rasana* and *abadhuti*) combined in the body to Uddiyana, Jalandhara, Purnagiri and Kamarupa.²⁰⁷ Thus, above discussion shows that certain tradition that attached with Assamese culture and tradition influenced by the Buddhists. Buddhist was the first religious group in the region, which adapted the local cult practices. Subsequently, the same was which were later absorbed in the new Brahmanical trends. Buddhists are pioneer in carrying the process of acculturation between Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical religion in Assam.²⁰⁸ Thus, outside the monastic institution the late tantric form of Buddhism associating with the indigenous belief and practices helped to the coalescence and emergence of a new religio-cultural trend.

After the development of Vajrayana there was shift of religious nature in the land. All the three major sectarian branches of Hinduism; namely, Saktism, Saivism and Vaisnavism are influenced by Mahayana form of Buddhism. Late Buddhist practices contributed to the development of some crypto-Buddhist practices namely,

²⁰² E. Zurcher, *Buddhism: Its Origin and Spread in Words, Maps and Pictures*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 24.

²⁰³ Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture in India*, *op.cit.*, p. 337; S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p. 274.

²⁰⁴ D. C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, pp. 77 & 11.

²⁰⁵ Mahaswar Neog, 'Buddhism in Kamarupa', *I.H.Q.*, vol. xxviii, June, 1952, p.146.

²⁰⁶ *Kalikapurana*, Chapter. 9 & 64, 43-44, as referred in D. C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *op.cit.*, p. 12.

²⁰⁷ Mahaswar Neog 'Buddhism in Kamarupa', *op.cit.*, p. 146.

²⁰⁸ The evolution of Kamakhya is one of the examples of the acculturation between the Brahmanical religious system and aboriginal faith that contributed by Buddhist faith in the region.

Dharma cult, Manasa and Ai etc. In Assam, Buddhist tantrics had initiated the process of assimilation between the faiths of aboriginal, non-Aryan with the orthodox Brahmanical system. The evolution of the Mother goddess Kamakhya is one of the examples of it.

Most of the scholars dealing with the religion of Assam, emphasis the autochthonous deities of the region had been converted to Puranic deities by the development of Brahmanical trend of Assam. It is less emphasized that how some of the deities were firstly associated with Buddhist practices.²⁰⁹ Buddhists were the first religious group in the region that adapted with local practices, which were later absorbed in neo Brahmanical trends. Buddhists are the pioneer in carrying the process of acculturation with indigenous cult practices. Thus, the wider gap between Brahmanical and non- Brahmanical cults was narrowed down by the development of tantricism that initiated in Assam by Tantric Buddhist in Assam.²¹⁰

Thus, on the basis of above discussion we can say that various aspects of Buddhism and its philosophy could influence each and every arena of cultural life of Assam. These were not only part and parcel to the pre -modern socio-cultural life but also in various forms to the contemporary life.

²⁰⁹ Gajendra Adhikary, *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 2001, p. 224.

²¹⁰ The evolution of Kamakhya is one of the examples of the acculturation between the Brahmanical religious system and aboriginal faith that contributed by Buddhist faith in the region.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Buddhism, which emerged in a state of significant socio- economic changes in northern India, had continued to respond to the contemporary social reality. From its earliest days of origin in India, Buddhism seems to be remarkably flexible and adaptable to different social and geographical environments. It received new modes of expression according to its needs for survival and expansion. Buddhism absorbed local features and contributed to the cultural evolution of the given region. It was under the patronage of Asoka, Buddhism largely spread across India and abroad and obtained a dominant position in India. Buddhism was introduced in Assam in post-Asokan period. The chronological affirmation of this extreme antiquity remains problematic but from the discussion in previous chapters, it shows that in the first few centuries of the Common Era, a group of the follower of Buddhism entered Assam using the trade routes from the western boundary of Assam. The socio-cultural contact and geographical location of the land that touched the Buddhist land led the easy access of Buddhist to the land. The early settlement of the Buddhist covers a large part of area including modern districts of Goalpara in Assam and Garo Hill (Meghalaya). Goalpara located near river Brahmaputra that developed as commercial center. When Mahayana had not developed into a fully independent institution, this section of the follower of Buddhism entered Assam and performed their practices by constructing stupas or by mantra practice. The features, such as meditation on stupas or mantra, that performed by the group of Buddhist in early part of its existence were similar with the practice of Mahayana Buddhism.

Though early Kamarupa have its socio-political contact with the nearby area such as Tamralipta and Karnasuvarna where both forms of Buddhism prevailed. Buddhism in Assam is largely indebted by the local cult practices along with Bon religion of Tibet. Assam was dominated by the faith of non-Aryan and aboriginal such as fetichism, magic worship etc. The group of Buddhists performed their practices in already developed some cultic sites. It was a fertile ground for the development of tantric traits. Buddhism adapted with the local cults of the non-Aryan in Assam that attached with fertility ritual and practices and accordingly developed tantric traits. Thus, though Buddhist Mahayana traits penetrated through

western boundary but developed its esoteric practices in early period with the importation of some ideas from neighbouring areas such as Tibet.

These esoteric practices were performed secretly till the period of Varmanas. In the seventh century i.e, during the period of early Salastambha rulers, Kamarupa became a noted center of Tantric form of Buddhism in eastern India. This was the period of development of esoteric Buddhism in other parts of India mostly under the patronage of Pala rule of Bengal. Tibet also gradually became the center of tantric Buddhism popularly known as Lamaism. At the same time, the non-intuitional Sahajiya Siddhas from different parts namely; Orissa, Bengal and Assam, Nepal, Tibet and even China developed a common bond of religious affinity. Accordingly, this form of Buddhism formed a wide cultural zone in this part of the World including Assam, Bengal, Nepal, Tibet and China. Buddhist of its tantric forms incorporated some esoteric features from indigenous cultures and developed various tenets within Tantricism.

In subsequent periods Buddhism failed to maintain its popularity with the same pace. The period, particularly after early Salastambha rulers due to the demands and pressures of an expanding agrarian order, the rulers of Kamarupa followed the Hindu ideology and promoted varna system. This ascendancy of Hinduism led to a remarkable change in the socio-religious pattern in Kamarupa. Some of the major trends that developed in the periods are development of Puranic form of Hinduism, state sponsored tantricism that influence Buddhism. The rulers of Kamarupa, who were promoters of *varna* based society of Hinduism also extended patronage to Tantricism. At that period, tantric practice penetrated into Hinduism that got associated with the political elite in Assam. With this state-sponsored Tantricism new development started in case of relationship in the field of fertility cults, and at Nilachala where the tribal shrines and cultic centers associated with Tantric form of Buddhism, developed as an abode Brahmanical Mother Goddess Kamakhya. In the same time, the Puranas served as instruments of propagation of religious ideology through myth.

Buddhism was introduced in Assam before the development of the Brahmanical culture to the life and thought of the people. Buddhism of its later aspect i.e. Tantricism was going side by side with the development of pre- Puranic and Puranic Hinduism in Kamarupa. Gradual development of sectarian divisions within Buddhism and the development of Puranic cults brought Buddhist practices

nearer to greater tradition of Hinduism. In course of time, these forms of Buddhism in Assam syncretised with three major branches of Hinduism, namely, Sakticism, Saivism and Vaisnavism. With the development of Vajrayana, many deities blended with Hinduise practice and Hindu mythology gave them Hinduise character. The fusion between Saktism and Buddhist mysticism also gave birth to new schools of Sakism and some new forms of popular religion such as *Yogini Kaula*. In course of time, those assimilated with orthodox Hinduism. The non-institutional Sahajiya Siddha developed a separate institution parallel to the royal institution that patronized *Varnasramadharma*. Buddhist Tantricism got its wide appeal among some of the professional caste. The non –institutional Sahajiya Buddhist who occupied space between institutional Esoterism and the larger world of Saiva and Sakta also contributed to this syncretism.

In Assam, the syncretism emerged as one of the major elements in the sphere of cultural formation. Its influence found expression in all strata of cultural life of Assam and provided artistic, linguistic, cultural, services for the emergence new culture. Even today, the distant echo felt in every aspect of cultural life of the region. The syncretic form of Buddhism dominated the religious sphere in the region as crypto-Buddhist practice. Buddhist initiated the process of assimilation, acculturation and integration of the aboriginal tribes into the expanding Brahmanical network at various levels. Assam witnessed a creative synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist civilizations and thus grew a composite tradition. With the Socio-political ascendancy of Hinduism Brahmans came to control the major cult's centers that had been associated with non-Aryans and Buddhists. Gradually, the places dominated by Buddhist Tantricism such as Nilacala, Hajo, either became a place of syncretism or became a place of Hinduise Tirtha.

Neo Vaisnavite writers were quite critical of prevailing form of Buddhism. It was during the Hindu revival of new Vaishnavite movement anti-Buddhist propaganda reached its peak and socially ostracized the Buddhists but Buddha was described as an incarnation of the god Vishnu. Many elements of Buddhism also present in neo-Vaisnavism. The rise of neo-Vaisnavism and coming of Ahoms who patronized Hinduism contributed to decrease of the popular support of Buddhism.

In initial period, the tantric Buddhist practices satisfied the emotion and ethos of the predominant non-Aryan people. The genuine Buddhist ideas in their subtle philosophical character did not satisfy the simple individual. They performed

some rites and rituals that call "Buddhist practice." Promoters of Hinduism considered Buddhist rituals and practices as the essential part of their spiritual mechanism. Therefore the Puranic trends absorbed all the features to counteract the influence of Buddhism. Since Kamarupa emerged from tribal society at the period of introduction of Buddhism, so the people of Kamarupa inclined towards Buddhism, but the mythical stories that developed through Purana became more popular than Buddhism. On the other hand, there are no material resources, no Buddhist schools, no good monasteries or funds or rich donors to maintain and take care of Buddhist monks. There is no Buddhist monastery to perform social and economic role till thirteen century.¹ Therefore, Buddhist gradually made relationship with various tenets of Hinduism. In the passage of time, Buddhism in Assam survived only as forms of crypto-Buddhist practices.

Kamaupa emerged as an important center of Esoteric Buddhism or Vajrayana in eastern India prior to the rule of Pala rulers of Bengal who extended patronage to tantric form of Buddhism. When after invasion of the Turks, Buddhism faced a crisis in Bengal and Bihar, in Kamarupa Buddhists continued to practice their rites and ritual practices till the rise of Sankardeva in the fifteenth century. Thus, Kamarupa is one of the most ancient places for the growth and development of Buddhist Tantricism in world, and served as a last shelter of esoteric forms of Buddhism in India. Buddhist tantricism had far-reaching impact on the socio-religious life, and contributed to the development of cultural trends of Assam.

¹ The Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala (dated 1154 Saka, i.e. 1232 CE) mentions about the existence of satara institution in Yogahati, where rituals were performed. The mention of Savasika satra means residential monastery. It indicates that this was a monastery o where the Buddhist Bhiksus practiced esoteric Sadhanas; for the details, see Sarma. D (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1981, p. 159; *Assam Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, p.306.

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Stupas and ruins of Suryapahar



Cave of Jogoghopa



Terracotta found in Goalpara



Sivalinga in Suryapahar



Ruins of Suryapahar



Statue of Budha found in Nilachala



Statue found in Nilachala



**Sculpture of the gate of Tara Temple at
Kamakhya**



**Sculpture of Archery contest at the
Kamakhya**











Introduction:

Buddhism emerged in India in the 6th century B.C. Subsequently, many schools of thoughts developed in India and abroad within its fold. As a ‘dynamic religion of the world’¹, it received new modes of expression according to its needs for survival and expansion. Studies have shown that Buddhism absorbed local features and even contributed to the cultural evolution of a given region. Going by the general findings, Assam could not have been an exception to the development. Writers dealing with the history of Assam have highlighted the region’s long socio-cultural contacts with the Indian mainland and its trade links with places such as Tibet, China, Bhutan, and Burma, where Buddhism had been dominant, from very early times. More importantly, the Brahmaputra Valley has been depicted as a region that had experienced waves of migration and settlement of people from various cultural and religious backgrounds.

Some studies have shown that Buddhism had entered Assam even before the development of ‘Brahmanical religion’.² Traces of Buddhism of early period of Assam can be seen at the places like Surya Pahar, Nilachala, and Hajo etc. People belonging to the lower strata of the *Varna* based brahmanical social order in Assam accepted Buddhism.³ Different forms of Buddhism such as Mantayana, Vajrayana, and Sahajayana and Kalacakrayana simultaneously developed with the Puranic religious sects like Saktism, Savism and Vaisnavism between the 7th and the 13th centuries A.D. in Assam. Buddhist elements seem to have influenced the rites and ritual practices, language and literature of all strata of the population of Assam.

¹ These are the words of Gayatri Sen Majumdar, “Buddhism in Ancient Bengal”, in *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, vol. xiii, 1977-78, p.243.

² For details, see H.K Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol-1, Publication Board of Assam, Gauhati, 1990, p.306; Nishipad Dev Choudhary, ‘The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam,’ *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol. xxix, no.82, 2004-2006, pp.201-216.

³ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam Prakashan Parisad, Guwahati 1972, p.142; Bharati Barua, ‘Secular Approach by the Ancient Kings of Pragjyotish: A Study’, *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol. XXXVI, nos.1&2, 1997(2003), p.25.

Statement of the problem:

The socio-cultural history of Assam is dominated by a good number of works on various aspects of Brahmanical religious sects especially on neo-Vaishnavism. However, the aspects of the origin, various forms and the impact of Buddhism have not yet been comprehensively dealt with. The socio-cultural history of pre-Ahom Assam has so far been reconstructed primarily from Brahmanical sources. The historians have paid less attention to the Buddhist sources in undertaking the research, whether in Assam or India as a whole. This is despite the avenues that the Buddhist sources open to the researcher. These sources are significant considering the fact that the traces of Buddhist beliefs and practices among various religious sects can still be found in Assam. There was thus the need to fill in this gap area.

Since it was impossible to cover the entire history of Buddhism of various sects in Assam within the limits of the prescribed time-frame for undertaking doctoral work, the focus of this study has been on the different forms of Mahayana that existed in pre-Ahom Assam and their influence on the socio-cultural developments during the period.

Objectives:

The objectives of this research have been as follows:

- i. To traces the beginnings and development of Buddhism in Assam;
- ii. To examine the impact of Buddhism on society and culture of pre-Ahom Assam and *vice-versa*.

Abstract of the chapters :

Chapter -1

Introduction

The introductory chapter deals with the geographical location of Assam, its ethnicity, political conditions, political ideology, internal, and external relationship, material structure- economy and trade cultural/religious beliefs where Buddhism was introduced and developed. It also includes a review of literature.

Assam is located in the south of the eastern Himalayas and is bordered on three sides with three international boundaries—Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Though Assam received a large variety of racial elements, it remained predominantly a land of the Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid trait. The political institutions and administrative systems of most of the rulers of Kamarupa provided the infrastructure to develop an ideal Brahmanical religion that was reflected in social formation too. Despite the fact that most of the rulers of Kamarupa were followers of Hinduism, during the early Saltastambha rulers Kamaruupa developed as a center of Buddhist tantricism.

The geographical position of Assam made it possible to become an area of interaction for the different groups of peoples from ancient times. Assam had been maintaining its trade contact with China from earliest period.⁴ There were commercial contact of Assam with Bengal, Orissa and Magadha and Tibet. Hinduism of its major sectarian divisions such as Saivism, Sakism and Vaisnavism prevailed in early Assam. Besides these, three major cults of Hinduism, Jainism⁵ and Buddhism also prevailed in early Assam. A remarkable shift in the religious nature of the region took place with the development of Tantricism that was marked by the assimilation of the Brahmanical Sakti-Tantricism with the Buddhist tantric form.⁶

Before the development of the Brahmanical religion in Kamarupa, Buddhism had its contact with its inhabitant. In the first few centuries of the Common Era, a

⁴ The earliest reference to commercial relations between India and China through the Assam Burma routes is found in the accounts of Changkien (200 B.C.) as cited, P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, Spectrum Publications Guwahati, Delhi, 1988, p.272.

⁵ Jainism was also not unknown in early Assam. Few rock cut Jaina images of ninth century AD are found in the cave of Surya Pahar, the Confluence of three major religions namely, Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. H.K.Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.1, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1990, pp.421-422.

⁶ Nirode Boruah, *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, Historical Geography of Early Assam, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2010, p.109.

section of Buddhists performed their practices by constructing stupas in Goalpara area.⁷ Buddhist group also associated at Nilachala, the sacred place of non-Aryan people of the region before the development of Brahmanical mother Goddess. They performed there worship to Tara, and the place became the famous seat of Vajrayana form or Tantric form of Buddhism by the 7th century C.E.⁸ In the successive periods, Buddhism found expression in three ways of mystic practices in early Assam; they are Vajrayana, Kalachakrayana and Sahajayana. Buddhism was accepted by the people belonging to the lower strata of society of the *Varna* based Brahmanical social order in Assam.⁹ Buddhist Tantricism had dominated different places of early Assam.

Review of literatures

In this Buddhological historiography, scholars generally assess the importance of the role of Sangha, monastery, ethical principles of early Buddhism without offering much analysis to Mahayana and Vajrayana and the non-institutional Buddhist Siddhas traditions which have taken a form somewhat different from its earlier tradition. Scholars, who deal with religion, have also examined the relationship between religion and philosophical formulations against the backdrop of socio-economic settings.¹⁰ Accordingly, the emergence of Buddhism has been studied in the context of the socio-economic milieu, i.e. the emerging agrarian order

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204 ; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, 1990, p. 429.

⁸ For details, see D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pithas', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.xiv, no.1, 1948.*op.cit.*, p. 12; B. Bhattacharya, 'Origin and Development of Vajrayana', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol.III, 1927, pp. 733-746.

⁹ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Assam buranji, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1972., p. 142.

¹⁰ For details, see William Ramp, 'Durkheim and After Religion, Culture, and Politics' in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Sociology of Religion*, John Wiley & Sons West Sussex, United Kingdom, second edition 2010, pp. 52-75; Max Weber, Talcott Parsons (trans.), *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scribners Sons, New York, 1958 ; Romila Thapar, *A History of Ancient India*, vol.1, Penguin, New Delhi, 1966; *idem.*, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Orient, New Delhi, 1978; R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1968 ; D.D Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and other Writings*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002; R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005; Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007.

and urbanization in early India.¹¹

The development of Mahayana and Tantric form of Buddhism which occurred several centuries later than the emergence of Buddhism in India, is studied with different socio-economic changes in India.¹² Ronald M. Davidson in his *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* deals with the background of Buddhist esoterism as a response to the different socio-cultural conditions of India, especially of the post-Gupta period.¹³ Similar phenomenon has been observed in the case of Assam and the work has proved quite helpful in the preparation of the monograph.

Buddhism in Assam remained a neglected field of study among the scholars working on Buddhism in India. Writers on Buddhism generally laid emphasis only on the Buddhism in northern India where major dynasties ruled and patronized Buddhism. In the process, they tended to ignore the histories of the other areas in the sub continent. In the major works dealing with Buddhism in India Assam only occurred in the context of an area where tantricism had developed and a place of association of Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas activities.¹⁴

There is no mention of Assam either in P.V. Bapat's book, *2500 years of Buddhism*¹⁵ or in Gail Omvedt's book, *Buddhism in India*.¹⁶ These two may be taken

¹¹ The large scale implementation of iron is instrumental for the extension of agriculture in the 7th - 6th century B.C. that resulted into the surplus production and it contributed to the growth of urban society in the Gangetic plains. Thus, the period was marked by the rise of urbanism and a new mercantile community, i.e. new forms of social and economic relations built around trade and agriculture. Buddhism seems to be a body of thought responding to the ideological sustenance of urban norms and values. For details, see D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990; Uma Chakravarty, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1996; V.K. Thakur, *Social Background of Buddhism*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 2006; D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1959; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India, Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, Sage, New Delhi, 2003; D. N. Jha, *Early India*, Munshiram Manohar Publisher, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 65-73; K. M. Shrimali, *The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution c. 700-c.350 BC*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2007.

¹² For details, see A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008. Some other scholars have also studied Buddhism and have tried to establish relationship between social formations and changes in the forms of Buddhism. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, 1984, p.148; Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Making of early Medieval India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994.

¹³ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; *idem*, *Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, first Indian edition, 2008; *idem*, *Tibetan Renaissance*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2008, p. 371.

¹⁴ P.C Bagchi, 'On foreign elements in the Tantra' *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol.vii, no- I, March, 1931; S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious*, Firma KLM Calcutta, 1949 (1st edn.) reprint 1995 Firma KLM; D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pihās' *op.cit.*; Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, *op.cit.*

¹⁵ P.V. Bapat (ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism*, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1956.

¹⁶ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmonism and Caste*, *op.cit.* p.154.

as representative of the general studies on Buddhism in India which have ignored Assam. But it has to be admitted that although the works do not deal directly with Assam, their insights into and formulations on the study of Buddhism have broad-based relevance and have proved useful in this monograph. To trace the development of that process in regional concept some works give valuable insight.¹⁷

As far as the works on Buddhism in pre-Ahom Assam are concerned until the mid twentieth century, a number of scholars¹⁸ did not even admit the prevalence of Buddhism in early Assam. Their observations are based mainly on two grounds: 1. Assam or Kamarupa was not included in Asoka's empire¹⁹ 2. neither epigraphic nor the authentic literary source materials afford any definite information for the existence of Buddhism in early Assam. In support of this argument they even mention the observation of Hieun Tsang that there was not monastery in Assam.²⁰

Western scholars of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century²¹ such as Csoma de Koros, and Colonel Shakespeare²² studied the Buddhism in Assam. Following the tradition current in Tibet, the Hungarian scholar Csoma de Koros made an attempt to identify the place of Buddha's death at Sualkuchi. E. T.

¹⁷ Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, *Obscure Religious cult*, Firma KLM Calcutta, 1st e 1949, reprint 1995.; Lal Mani Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture in India*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1967; S.C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in its Origin, Development and Influence*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi 1992; Hazra Kanai Lal, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with Special reference to India and Ceylon*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers New Delhi, 1982; Manikuntala Haldar (De), *Baudha Dharmer Itihas*, MahaBodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 1996, reprint, 2007.

¹⁸ N.K. Bhaattasali, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol. xxii, p. 252 as referred in H.K Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, op.cit., p. 332; P. Bhattacharya, 'Buddhism in Assam', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, vol -IV, 1936, pp. 115-118 and N.N. Dasgupta, 'Buddhism in Kamarupa', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1950, vol-xxvi, no. 1, p. 334.

¹⁹ R.C. Mazumder, *History of Ancient India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 8th edn., 1977, p. 270f.

²⁰ T. Watters, T. W. Rhys Davids & S.W. Bushell (ed.), *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India*, vol-II, London, 1904, p. 186; Shaman Hwui Li, *The life of Hieun-Tsang* (tr.), Samuel Beal, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. 1911, popular edition 1914, p. 171.

N.B. there is certain definite information found regarding Buddhism of that period in the account of Hieun Tsang. Hieun Tsang who visited Kamarupa in the second quarter of the seventh century, observes that 'the people worshipped the devas and did not believe in Buddhism. So there had never been a Buddhist monastery in the land, and whatever Buddhists there were in it performed their acts of devotion secretly... though the king was not a Buddhist he treated accomplished sramanas with respect' (Watters. T. II, p. 186.) Silabhadra persuaded Hieun-Tsang to accept the invitation of Bhaskarvarman on the plea that 'within his territories the law of Buddha had not widely extended' (*Life of Hieun Tsang*, p. 165.)

²¹ Csoma de Koros, *The Life and Teaching of Buddha*, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 33, 49ff.; L. W. Shakespeare, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and North-Eastern Frontier*, Macmillan, London, 1914 (1st edn.) reprint, 2004 Spectrum publications, Guwahati, pp. 71-74.

²² L. W. Shakespeare, op.cit., p. 71f, Calcutta Review, 1867, pp. 509-532.

Dalton after examining some of the remains of Assam has expressed his view that they had been built with material belonging to earlier Buddhist shrines.²³

The articles published in 1927 study two other aspects of Buddhism in Assam. B. Bhattacharya is of the view that among the four ancient important Vajrayani centers of Buddhism, three were located in Assam.²⁴ He also informs that Luipada, who is regarded as one of the originators of the Shahajiya School of Buddhism, hailed from this area.²⁵ S.C. Goswami tries to justify the existence of Buddhism in early Assam and examines the presence of various elements of Buddhism in neo-Vaisnavism.²⁶

These studies are followed by some fragmentary works that are concerned with the various aspects of the existence of Buddhism in early Assam.²⁷ Based on Buddhist traditions and literature, K.L.Barua studies the later aspects of Buddhism in Kamarupa. According to him, Buddhist Tantricism did not originate in Assam but it was a reputed center of Vajrayana until the development of neo-Vaisnavite movement led by Sankardeva. Maheswar Neog²⁸ made some attempts to study the existence of Buddhism in early Assam utilising wider range of evidence such as: the inscriptions that are found in and outside the region, Buddhist literary works along with neo-Vaisnavite literatures). R.M. Nath²⁹ observes the existence of Buddhist elements in socio-cultural life of Assam too.

These are the pioneering studies on Buddhism in Kamarupa. However, a number of scholars³⁰ have also studied particularly the later aspects of Buddhism in Assam. Among the works on religion and culture in early Assam, the work *The*

²³ E.T Dalton, 'Notes of Assam Temple Ruins,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol-Lxiv, 1855, p. 10f.

²⁴ B. Bhattacharya mentions four Vajrayana centers as Srihatta, Oddiyana, Purnagiri and Kamarupa.

²⁵ B. Bhattacharya, 'Origin and Development of Vajryana', *I.H.Q.*, vol-iii, 1927, no-1, pp. 733 & 746.

²⁶ S.C.Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam' *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1927, no.I, vol.iii. , 47-756.

²⁷ K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.ii, no.2, 1934, pp. 44-49; P. Gogoi, 'Buddhism in Kamarupa under Bhaskarvarman', *J.A.R.S.*, vol.xvi, 1962, pp. 52-56.

²⁸ M. Neog, 'Buddhism in Kamrupa', *I.H.Q.*, vol-xxvii, June, 1951, no. 2, pp. 144-150.

²⁹ R.M. Nath, 'Lui Pada and Matsyendranath', *J.A.R.S.*, vol. vii, no.1, 1939, pp. 48-57.

³⁰ P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1987; H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam* vol.-I, *op.cit.*; B.K Baruah, *A cultural History of Assam* (earlyPeriod) vol-I, Bina library, Guwahati, fourth edition, 2003; K.L.Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Lawyers Book Stall Guwahati, 1960., Rajmohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Datta Barua and co. Guwahati, 1978.

*Mother Goddess Kamakhya*³¹ deals with various aspects of the religious history of early Assam. It tries to re-evaluate the *Puranic* myths. Though the prime objective of the work is to deal with the Sakta shrine of Kamakhya, the author focuses the evolution of Buddhist Tantra. Glimpses are also found about the early existence of Buddhist Tara deity at Nilachala premise when he described the various aspects of the origin of Kamakhya. However, he does not portray a complete picture of the evolution of Buddhist tantricism in Kamakhya. *Nilacala Kamakhya*³² is another recent work that deals with the evolution of goddess Kamakhya at Nilacala. Using various sources (legends, iconography and Tantric texts), the author asserts about the existence of Buddhist tantrism in Kamarupa that contributed to the development of Hinduised deity Kamakhya Kameswari. These works have not only been consulted but also have been found useful in the preparation of this monograph.

S. Sasananda³³ and B. Tripathy and S. Dutta,³⁴ have studied the general aspects of the existence of Buddhism in ancient Assam. S. Sasananda sometimes distorts some sources and tries to prove the prevalence of Theravada Buddhism in early Assam. Sasananda cites ‘Thera Dhitika’ in place of ‘Arya Dhitika’ as mentioned by D.P. Chhotopadhyaya. This distortion is only to establish that Theravada doctrine prevailed in Assam in the early period.³⁵

Some works on culture and religion (both in English and vernacular language) focus on the existence of Buddhist elements in socio-cultural life of early Assam. However, they do not describe the Buddhist response either to primitive society or to that of caste-oriented society of pre-Ahom Assam.³⁶ There is also reference about the existence of Buddhism found in the *Assam Buranji*. Gunabhiram Barua mentions that some people of professional group such as Dom embraced

³¹ B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, third edition, 2004.

³² Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, Distributors Assam Book Depot, Lawyer’s Book Stall, first edition, 2004.

³³ S. Sasananda, *History of Buddhism in Assam*, Bahri Publication, New Delhi, 1986.

³⁴ B. Tripathy & S. Dutta (eds.), *Buddhism in North- East India*, Indus Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006.

³⁵ Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranatha’s History of Buddhism in India* (trans. Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chhotopadhyaya), Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1970 (1st edn edn.), reprint 1990 New Delhi ; S. Sasananda, *History of Buddhism in Assam, op cit.* , pp. 101-103.

³⁶ Maheswar Neog, *Religion of North East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008; *idem.*(ed.) *Banikanta Rasanawali, Kalitajitir Itibritta, Purani Asamar Dharmar Dhara*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1991; *idem.*, *Rasanawali*, vol.1, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 1996; Jatindra Kumar Borgohain, *Asamar Sanskritik Itihas*, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 2007.

Buddhism due to the prevailing caste system. But the chronology of the development is missing in his work. Moreover, the book takes no cognizance of any supporting evidence.³⁷

Recently, periodical excavations in the areas of Goalpara, Paglatek and Barbhita area, new dimension of the history of Buddhism have been added and accordingly new observations are being made about the prevalence of Buddhism in early Assam.³⁸

The studies so far on Buddhism are being made are unable to assess its influence on the socio-cultural life of Assam or the nature of the response of the population to the religion. Moreover, the works mentioned thus far are by and large descriptive in nature and hardly display any attempt on the part of the authors to interpret the evidence in any critical manner.³⁹

³⁷ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

³⁸ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'Role of Rivers for the Development of Civilisation with special reference to the History and Culture of the Garo Hills, Meghalaya', *J.A.R.S.*, vol-xxxvi, nos. 1 & 2, 1997; *idem.*, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*

³⁹ Buddhism with its various forms associated with some areas and the factors contributing to the growth of those forms had not been studied in connection with trade guilds, modes of production, the ideal of *varnasramadhama* or in terms of socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Chapter- 2

Beginnings and Development of Buddhism in Assam

This chapter focuses on the beginning and development of Buddhism in Assam. The chapter also tries to highlight different temporal and local conditions that influenced the nature of the development of Buddhism in different socio-political periods of Assam. As the Buddhist tantric traits mostly dominated in the region, the chapter also deals with origin, development and nature of tantricism in details.

Both archaeological⁴⁰ and early Buddhist literary work⁴¹ provides the information about the early existence of Buddhism. Besides, traces of the development of Buddhism are also found in Brahmanical literature in form of myth. Lama Taranatha, the 17th century scholar refers several times about the existence of Buddhism in early Kamarupa.⁴² However, all the testimonials furnish that Buddhism was introduced in Assam during post-Asokan period. In the first few centuries of the Common Era, a group of the followers of Buddhism entered Assam using the trade

⁴⁰The period of earliest votive stupas that found in Surya Pahar placed between 100 B.C. and 100 AD. For details see, H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, P.429; Nishipad Dev Chodhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, pp.204- 208.

Note: The mention of Cilata in the Nagarjunikunda inscription (Andhra Pradesh) of the 3rd century AD indicates the prevalence of Buddhism in those days as the word Cilata represents *Kirata* or Kamarupa. (The Mongoloid inhabitants of eastern frontier traditionally known as Kirata see Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'Kirata-Jana-Kirti,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol-xiv no1, 1948, p.167.) R.M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, *op.cit.* p.31; Maheswar Neog, *Buddhism in Kamrupa*, *op.cit.* p.145.

⁴¹ T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Aryamanjusri Mulakalpa* vol-II, Trivandrum Sanskrit series no. lxxvi, 1922, p. 325; *idem.*, (ed.), *Aryamanjusri Mulakalpa*, vol-III, Trivandrum Sanskrit series no. lxxxiv, 1925, pp. 628 & 648.

It is important here to mention that the scholars are not unanimous over the period of the composition of *Aryamanjusri mulakalpa*. Benoytosh Bhattacharya is of the view that this was composed between second or third century AD and possibly by Nagarjuna. Whereas Hajime Nakamura is of the view that the copy of *Aryamanjusri Mulakalpa*, which is available to us is not the product of that period and some of the chapters have been composed much after. The work originally consisted of twenty-eight chapters or even less, and the copy which we have comprises of fifty-five chapters is published by the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series. He further emphasises that the 53rd Chapter of *Aryamanjusri Mulakalpa* was composed in the middle of the 8th century during the reign of Gopala of Pala dynasty of Bengal. Hajime Nakamura's view is also endorsed by Joseph Walser. For details of these views, see Benoytosh Bhattacharya, 'Tantrika Culture among the Buddhist', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 263 & 272; Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1987, p. 319; Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in Context*, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 2008, p.21.

⁴² Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, *op.cit.*, pp.45 & 132- 133.

routes⁴³ from the western boundary of Assam and performed their practices by constructing stupas in Goalpara area.⁴⁴ Scholars situate the development of rock cut votive stupas of Surya Pahar near Goalpara as early as between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100.⁴⁵ Buddhist groups came in touch with the inhabitants before the development of Brahmanical religion in Assam. They associated and adapted with the prevailing beliefs and faiths. Initially the interaction started between the Buddhist practices and the practices of the indigenous people of Assam. Subsequently, the elements of Bon religion too influenced the interaction and as an outcome of these the tantric traits developed in Assam. Inference of this can be found in form of myth in the Brahmanical literature.⁴⁶ This form of Buddhist practices were performed secretly till the period of Varman dynasty. During the period of last ruler of Varman dynasty, i.e. Bhaskarvarman, Hieun Tsang visited the kingdom according to the invitation of the former. Bhaskarvarman showed his great reverence to Buddhism. Buddhist tantricism became well established in Kamarupa with the ascendancy of Salastambha, who was probably follower of *Salistambha Sutra* of Mahayana Buddhism.⁴⁷ Inspired by the royal association of Buddhism,⁴⁸ the new movement of Buddhism became visible in Assam after the generations of secret spells. Kamarupa emerged as one of the important centers of Vajrayana among the four Vajrayana

⁴³ Buddhist settlement it found caves and monasteries, generally located in the area of major trade routes as they are patronized by merchants and merchant guilds D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 2nd edition, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1975, pp. 182-185; R. Thapar, *A History of India*, p. 68; D. N. Jha, *Early India*, pp. 138-139.

⁴⁴ The area including Bhaitabari perhaps was the capital of varmana rulers who ruled in Assam till the end of seventh century AD. See for details Nishipad Dev Choudhary, Role of Rivers for the Development of Civilisation with special reference to the History and Culture of the Garo Hills, Meghalaya. *The Journal of the Assam Reserch Society*, vol. xxxvi, nos.1&2, 1997, p.181; A.K. Sarma, *Emergence of Early culture in India*, as cited in Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism', *op.cit.*, p.207.

⁴⁵ Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p.204; H.K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, P.429.

⁴⁶ Tantric goddess Tara and Ugratara are said to have discovered and introduced from China or Tibet by Nagarjuna (*Arya-Nagarjunapadaih Bhotesu uddhrtam*). It has mentioned in the Brahmanical literature *Rudrayamala* and *Brahmayamala* that Vasistha brought the *Cina cara* (a particular mode of *Sadhana*) from Mahacina. For details see P.C. Bagchi, Evolution of Tantra, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, *op.cit.*, p.225; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op. cit*, p.303.

⁴⁷ *Salistambha sutra* deals with the Mantrayana diction of Mahayana path of Buddhism. Accordingly presumes that the name of king Salastambhaa derives from the '*Salistambha Sutra*' of Mahayana Buddhism. For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op. cit.* pp. 6&14.

⁴⁸ The early Salastmbha rulers might have extended patronage to the Buddhist tantric establishment at Kamakhya as the older temple at Kamakhya which was once a Tantric Buddhist center dated back to 7th to 8th to eight century. P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

centers as mentioned in Hevajra Tantra of the seventh century.⁴⁹ The period after seventh century was marked by the development of tantric form of Buddhism in other parts of India and Tibet.⁵⁰ Gradually, tantric Buddhist scholars or Sahajiya Siddhas had developed a common bond of religious affinity between Orissa, Bengal, Nepal, Tibet and Assam and formed a wide cultural zone.⁵¹

There are numbers of images largely affiliated to Mahayana and Vajrayana found in different parts of Assam⁵² that furnished the spread of Buddhism in different parts of Assam. Buddhist Tantricism got its wide appeal among some of the professional caste.⁵³ Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha Minnatha was followed by the people of different professions such as *Hali* (a peasant), *Mali* (a gardener), and *Tambuli* (a tooth painter).⁵⁴

The rulers of Kamarupa particularly after the early Salastambha, who followed the Hindu ideology extended patronage to Tantricism.⁵⁵ Accordingly, the tantric practice penetrated into Hinduism and among the political elites of Assam. With this state-sponsored Tantricism, new development started in the case of relationship in the field of fertility cult and accordingly appeared new deity Kamakhya-Kameswari that was patronized by the rulers of Kamarupa.⁵⁶ Gradually Tantric practices penetrated to major sectarian divisions of new Brahmanical trends such as Satkism, Savisim and Vaismvism. Consequent upon the political patronage

⁴⁹ G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra, With the Commentrary Yogaratnamala Tantra*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, reprint, 2001, *op.cit.*, pp.76-77.

N.B. B. Bhattacharya of the opinion that *Hevajra Tantra* was composed shortly before 693AD, but according to Buddhist tradition Padmavajra, author of the *Hevajra Tantra*, was the preceptor of Anangavajra, a son of Gopala, who founded the Pala dynasty in Bengal about the middle of the eight century. For details, see D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pihās', *op.cit.*, p.12.

⁵⁰ Dimbeswar Sarma, 'Trends of religion in Ancient Kamarupa', *The Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol. xvi, 1962, p.27.

⁵¹ The esoteric Buddhism transmitted to Tibet, Nepal, China and Nepal from India. Editors preface, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, The Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, 1958, vol.1, p. Lxii.

⁵² P. C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p.332.

⁵³ Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, *op.cit.*, p.142.

⁵⁴ Bhupendranath Datta(tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, Ramkrishan Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 1957, p.75.

⁵⁵ The Tantric *Anji* sign first time appeared in the Tejpur Copper plate grant of Vanamala varman 12(835 C.E.-855 C.E.). That was followed by in inscriptions of successive periods such as Parbatiya Copper Plate grant of Vanamaladeva, Uttarbilla Copper plate of Balbarman III. For details, see Dimmeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, Publication Board of Assam, 1981, pp.148-149. N.B. King Indrapala was proficient in Tantra along with other branches of study. M.M. Sharma, *Inscription of Ancient Assam*, Gauhati University, Guwahati, 1978, p.187.

⁵⁶ There is not even veil reference of Kamakhya found in the inscription until the ninth century A.D. The earliest inscription where mentioned Kameswara-Mahagauri is the Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamala, (line 10 -12) of 9th century. Mentions of Mahagauri –Kamesvarayoh also found in Guwakuchi grant of Indrapala (the line 49) of 11th century (c 1071 AD). Mukunda Madhab Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *ibid.*, pp.104,112, 202.

to Hinduism, the Brahmins could control the major cultic centers that had been associated so far with non-Aryans and the Buddhists.⁵⁷ The places dominated by Buddhist Tantricism such as Nilachala, Hajo and Surya Pahar⁵⁸ either became a place of syncretism or became a place of Hindu Tirtha.

Prior to the Pala rule in Bengal, Kamarupa became an important center of Vajrayana in eastern India. The Buddhist tantric practices had continued till the rise of neo-Vasnavism,⁵⁹ when in Bengal and other parts of India Buddhism apparently disappeared by the 13th century. Thus, Kamarupa is one of the most ancient places for the growth and development of Buddhist Tantricism in the world, and served as a last shelter of other forms of Buddhism in India.

Chapter 3

Forms of Buddhism in Assam

This chapter deals with the nature of transformation of Buddhism after its introduction in Assam. It focuses the gradual development of the nature of the ritualistic aspects that reveal from the early stupa worship to the synthesis of esoteric Buddhism with neo-Brahmanical religion.

About hundred years after the death of Buddha, the disputes arose over the observance and interpretation of the monastic discipline and many schools developed within Buddhism. The Mahayana school is one of them. Till Mahayana had not developed into a separate institutional identity,⁶⁰ a section of the follower of Buddhism entered Assam⁶¹ and associated with cultic centers of non-Aryan or pre-

⁵⁷ After penetrating Brahmanical religion in to tribal areas, tantricism within Hinduism was developed as the result of a fusion between brahmanical religion and tribal or folk religions. R. N., Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973.

⁵⁸ The Brahmanical sculptures which found in the stupa premises of Surya Pahar are the product of the ninth century. For details, see H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, pp. 463-464.

⁵⁹ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, *op.cit.*, p.219.

⁶⁰ In the initial stage of the development, the propounders of Mahayana seem to have been homeless ascetics who did not belong to any orthodox Sangha, around fifth century CE, it began to occupy privileged positions in selected monasteries. For details, see Joseph Walser, *Nagarjuna in context, op.cit.*, pp.13-36.

⁶¹ Scholar opines that Mahayana form of Buddhism penetrated Assam from its western boundary in the early Christian era. Nishipad Dev Choudhary, 'The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p. 206.

Vedic people.⁶² They involved with Stupa worship or mantra practices; the practices that connect with meditation of Mahayana Buddhism.⁶³ Gradually, the ritualistic aspects of Buddhism found expression in forms of Mantrayana, Vajrayana and Kalacakrayana in Assam. There are several references found in *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, about the prevalence of Mahayana deities with mantra practice. It has mentioned in the work that the *mantras* given by *Manjusri Kumarbhuta*,⁶⁴ *mantras* of Kartikeya⁶⁵ flourished in Kamarupa. The work also mentions that Kamarupa was a fertile soil for the development of the Tara formula.⁶⁶ The mantra vehicle of Mahayana form further developed to Vajrayana and the Mahayana deity Tara who was worshiped in Kamarupa in second century was developed as deities Sweta Tara along with Sambara Heruka.⁶⁷

The development of this form of Buddhism in Kamarupa occurred entirely outside the established Buddhist monastic framework and spread to different areas. The area viz. Surya Pahar and Nilachala presumably the original center of Buddhist practice in Assam developed as place of tantric center.⁶⁸

After that, one of the offshoots of Vajrayana, i.e. Sahajayana School of Buddhism spread and developed by the new form of Buddhist personality represented by the perfected ones (*siddha*).⁶⁹ There are many important Sahajiya Siddhas from Assam, including the originator of this philosophy.⁷⁰ Some prominent

⁶² Scholar identifies Suryapahar with the place of Sun worship or 'Ravikhsetra' that mentioned in *Kalikapurana*. H. K. Barpujari(ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1 *op.cit.*, p.324. N.B. early Buddhist group performed their practice of *Tara mantra* at Kamakhya, the place where the indigenous non- Aryan people associated with their mother cult. The name of Kamakhya and the mode of its worship originated from Austric and other aboriginal cult. The fissured stone in Kamakhya at Nilachala that symbolizes the female cult Ka-mei-Kha gradually personified as *Devi*. For details, see BanikantaKakati, *The Mother GoddessKamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp.16&38-40.

⁶³ The Mahayana Buddhist work *Lotus sutra* or *Sadharmapundarika* assigned first and second century AD, addressed to female deities. Hajime Nakamura *Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p.334.

⁶⁴ Mahayanists considered Manjusri Kumarbhuta as one of the important and honoured Bodhisattvas. Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, *op.cit.* p. 319; T. Ganapati Sastri, (ed.), *Aryamanjusri mulakalpa* vol-II, 30 Patala (Chapter), *op.cit.*, p. 325.

⁶⁵ T. Ganapati Sastri, (ed.), *Aryamanjusri mulakalpa* vol-III, *op.cit.*, p. 628.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.648 ; B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, *op.cit.* p. 32 ; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.*, p.303.

⁶⁷ The tantric deities Mahacina SwetaTara and Sambara Heruka were worshipped in Kamarupa the seventh–eight century. For details, See Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op. cit.*, p.46.

⁶⁸ There are some *Siva Lingas* along with *Younipith* found in the stupa complex of Surya Pahar area. The *Siva Lingas* along with *Younipith* represent Siva and Sakti which always play an important role in tantra. Thus, it suggests that the place gradually developed as Tantrik center.

⁶⁹ Siddha means attainment of certain supernatural power or attainment of Siddhi by performing certain Yogic practices. They attached with mystic school and developed a kind of theology.

⁷⁰ For details see P.C. Bagchi, *The cult of the Buddhist Siddhacarya*, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol-iv, *op.cit.*, p.276. B. Bhattacharya, *Origin and development of Vajrayana*, *op.cit.*, pp. 745-746.

Buddhist *Siddhas* associated with this land are Saraha, Luipada⁷¹ and Minnatha or Matsendranatha.⁷² The Sahajiya Siddhas of Assam also performed all higher Tantras those were related to the Kalacakrayana.⁷³

It has been said that the practices of Kalacakra *Tantra* accelerated the process of assimilation between Hinduism and Buddhism.⁷⁴ The syncretism is reflected in the three major sectarian divisions of Brahmanical religion. The syncretism between Buddhism and Saktism is found expression in Kamakhya at Nilachala. The deity Kamakhya appeared as a new deity in the early-medieval Brahmanical literature of Assam. Kamakhya-Kameswari has evolved due to the intermixing of Boudha cult of Chinnamasta- Vajravarahi and Kameswari cult and the seed of incarnation of the tantra for the goddess Kamakhya are still addressed to *Vajra-Yogini*, *Vajra Varahi* and *Vajra-Vairocini*.⁷⁵ The Syncretism between Saivism and Buddhist tantricism also found expression in iconography and literature in Assam. This syncretism is best reflected in the cult *Heruka*. *Heruka* (Tibetan *khrag thung*), the most popular Tantric Buddhist deity, is worshipped in Kamarupa (at Nilachala) in the form of Sambara Heruka along with its consort Sweta Tara Kurukilla.⁷⁶ In course of time, in a myth in *Kalikapurana* Heruka is portrayed as born out of Siva.⁷⁷ This Heruka is also described in *Kalikapurana* as the cemetery divinity.⁷⁸ The site of the cremation ground as specified in *Kalikapurana*, there is a small temple dedicated to the ferocious divinity now known as *Masan-Bhairo*

⁷¹ The first *Pada* of the Caryapada was also attributed to Luipa and in its commentary in Sanskrit Munidatta mentions him as the *Adisiddhacharya*. Haraprasad Shastri, *Hajar Bacharer Purano Bangala Bhashay Bauddhagan O Doha* (in Bengali), Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata, 1916, reprint 2006 Kolkata, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, p.5.

⁷² Mina and Maccindra was referred as different person. 'The father became famous as the Siddha Mina, the son as the Siddha Maccindra .Mina is referred (p. 74) as the disciple of Kukkuṭi and he was the fisherman on the east of India, in Kamarupa. In the Bhupendranath Datta, (tr.), *Mystic tales of Lama Taraanatha op.cit.*, pp. 74-75.

⁷³ D.P. Chottopadhyaya (ed.), *Taranathas History of Buddhism in India, op.cit.*, p.153.

⁷⁴ See Biswanath Benerjee , *Sri Kalacakratantra Raja*, New Asiatic printers, Calcutta Park street Calcutta, 1993, p. xiii. Both *Kalacakratantra* and *Saiva tantra* belong to the metaphysical schools of Buddhism and Hindu *Tantra*, which aim to attain the perfect enlightenment that is state of perfect Monism. The non-duality of *Kalacakra* and *Visvatmata*, and Siva with Sakti form the hallmark of these Tantric systems. Neither *Visvatmata* is separated from Kalacakra, nor is Sakti separated from Siva L. P. Sing, *Buddhist Tantra, op.cit.* ,106.

⁷⁵ Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya, op.cit.* 14 & 46.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* ,p. 46.

⁷⁷ *Kalikapurana* Chapter.76,v. 88-90 referred in Biswanarayan Sastri(ed.), *Kalika Purana Murtivinirdesh*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, p.81.

⁷⁸ *Kalikapurana* 63.135–137, referred to in Pitambara Siddhantavagisha's *Tirtha Kaumudi*, Biswanarayan Sastri (ed.), Anundoram Barua Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Assam, first edition 1998, p. 270 . (Pitambara was court pandit of Naranarayana (1540-1584) who quotes *Kalikapurana* and *Yogini Tantra* in compiling his work.)

(Smasana-Bhairava).⁷⁹ In the north of the presently non-existing temple of Heruka (at present it is called *Bhairabi mandir*) there is an idol sculptured in a stone that represents *Kala Bhairava* which is a combination of Hindu Mahakala Bhairava and Boudha Heruka.⁸⁰ In succeeding period, Heruka assumed the form of Vasudeva.⁸¹ The syncretism leading to Vishnu is also found in the iconography at Sukreswar (Guwahati) that is popularly known as Buddha- Janardana⁸² and a statue is also found at Numaligarh representing the similar development.⁸³ The assimilation between Vishnu and Buddhist tantricism is also reflected in the cult Hayagriva that is worshipped at Hajo.⁸⁴ In subsequent period, Hayagriva of Assam became an incarnation of Vishnu⁸⁵ but an ally with Madhava.⁸⁶ However, Hayagriva retains its tantric mode of worship.⁸⁷ The work of 16th century, i.e. *Yogini Tantra* has prescribed meat of buffalo, fish among various offerings in worshipping Hayagriva like a tantric deity which are unusual items of offering to the Vishnu.⁸⁸

The non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas further contributed to the assimilation between Hinduism and Buddhism. In this regard the contribution of Siddha Minnatha who is the symbol of assimilation between Saiva tantra and Buddha tantra, attached to the two schools such as Yogini Kaula and Nathism that represents the syncretism between Hinduism and later Buddhist practices is very

⁷⁹ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, op.cit., p.213.

⁸⁰ The temple of Bhairabi was earlier known as temple of Heruka. Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, op.cit., p. 92.

⁸¹ *Yogini Tantra* mentions 'Herukang Dvadeshvarnena Vasudeva rupinang' Suren Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, Dutta Barua Publishing Company, Guwahati, 1994, p. 483.

⁸² H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 1, op.cit., p. 392.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.395.

⁸⁴ Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam: A Brief Study', *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 31st session, 2010, pp. 47-51.

⁸⁵ Hayagriva is mentioned as one of the incarnation of Vishnu in 16th century, *Vaisnava* literature in Assam. Mahapurusa Sankardev added 'Hayagriva' 'Dhruva' and Hari with other 21 incarnations mentions in Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev, Narayan Chandra Goswami, (ed.), *Bhagavat Purana Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha*, Students stores, Gowahati, second edition 2001, p. 9; Nabin Chandra Sarmah, *Purani Asomiya Sahityar Subas*, Bani Prakash, 1988, p. 207.

⁸⁶ Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam a Brief Study,' op.cit., p. 51.

N.B. In the Puspabhadra grant of Dharmapala (first half of 12th century) referred to a temple dedicated to Sri Madhusudana (l.18). Here the donee is also Madhusudana who is celebrated to have worshipped the lotus feet of Madhava. M.M Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, op.cit., pp. 264-265.

⁸⁷ Tantric rituals influenced the Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva, who was worshipped with Tantric rituals eight syllables, twelve syllables and eighteen syllables mantras H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.I, p. 332; J.C Ghosh, 'Hayagriva worship In Assam', op.cit., p. 48 ; for details, see Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 38-40; Bobby Das, 'Hayagriva in Assam A Brief Study', op.cit., pp. 47-51.

⁸⁸ Suren Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua (eds.), *Yogini Tantram*, op.cit, pp. 550-551; Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, op.cit., p. 40;

important.⁸⁹ The ritualistic practices that developed in the forms of Mantrayana, Vajrayana, Sahajayana and Kalacakrayana were also appropriated by Hindu practitioners. Thus, the role and importance of the Buddhist practitioners specializing in the Buddhist practices declined. All these occupy an important place in the socio-religious life of the pre-Ahom Assam.

Chapter- 4

Impact of Buddhism on the Social Life of Assam

This chapter discusses the influence of Buddhism on the social life of Assam.

Buddhism introduced in the land before shaping of Brahmanical norms in the society but there is neither any authentic evidence of the existence of any monastery nor *mahaviharas* which led to firm institutionalisation of Buddhism as a religion in early Assam. In early period, the small section of Buddhist group and the secret esoteric practitioners could not influence the society. After the seventh century, esoteric Buddhism in India was performed in two ways 1. by the monks in the monastic institutions and 2. by the non-institutional individual Buddhist *Siddhas*.⁹⁰ The ritualistic practices of Vajrayana along with the non-institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha tradition influenced many aspects of the society of Assam.

Buddhist Tantricism influenced that section of society whose social mobility was thwarted by taboos of *Varna* system of Brahmanical religion. Professional class such as Dom or Kaivartas who had their sound economic condition⁹¹ fostered the desire to have higher or equal position in the society and they embraced Buddhism.⁹² The non institutional Sahajiya Buddhist Siddhas who were able to attract the followers from all social classes extensively interacted with the outcastes, tribal groups and different sects.⁹³ They also led the religious and philosophic movement

⁸⁹ Matsyendranath is considered as the propounder of the *Kaula Path*. *Yogini Kaulas* doctrine is popular in Kamarupa. The followers of *Yogini Kaula* adopted many practices of the Sahajiya school of Buddhist tantra. Both the *Yogini Kaulas* and Buddhist Sahajiya tantrics had the same goal: to transcend duality by concentrating the mind. Swami Ishatmananda, 'Shakti Puja and Sri Ramakrishna', *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 115, no.6, June 2010, p.366.

⁹⁰ For details, see Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, p.76.

⁹¹ Doms or the *Kaivartas* enjoyed their sound socio-economic status but in the framework of *Varnasramadharama*, they were of low-grade. About 9th century, they constitute a powerful group in the society. Mukunda Madhab Sharma, *Insription of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-83.

⁹² Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, *op.cit.*, p.142.

⁹³ See for details Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, *op.cit.*, pp.5 & 371.

associating with the lowest castes and professions group.⁹⁴ Sahajiya Buddhists strictly attached to *Guruvada* (devotion to preceptor) or Preceptor disciple lineage.⁹⁵ This led to achieve the *de facto* aristocratic status of the *guru* (preceptor) which was not possible to obtain such position by birth in Brahmanical social system. Siddha Minnatha who hailed from the fisher community of Kamarupa was followed by the people of different professions.⁹⁶ Accordingly, they developed a separate institution parallel to the royal institution that patronized *Varnasrama*.

The non-institutional Sahajiya Siddhas shaped their own orthodox norms outside the value and norms of the Brahmanical society.⁹⁷ The first social criticism (the rejection of the orthodox social order and the rejection of the Vedic sacrificial system) found expression in the writings of Sahajiya Siddha who hailed from the region.⁹⁸

The violation and degradation of socio-ethical rule by the Buddhist (tantric) are frequently referred to in the writings of neo-Vaisnavite reformers of Kamarupa.⁹⁹ However, there are no contemporary source materials that throw light on the sexual abuse or indulgences that occurred during the heyday of Vajrayana. Contrary to the view we find there was great reverence towards Buddha that found expression even in the inscription.¹⁰⁰ When Vajrayana doctrine openly preached by the Siddhas, it was difficult to understand the subtle philosophy by average people and overshadowed by many crude and ‘corrupt’ practices. Though the main aim of the tantric Buddhist practices was to achieve self control, in later period, these practices were manipulated for the purposes of personal power and gratification.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ In the *Carya Padas* of Sahajiya Siddhas even the imageries and conception centered on the lower classes. The songs attached with the characters as the *Candali*, *Dombi*, *Rajaki*, *Savari* and the female names represent some of the lowest castes carrying on the most despised occupation. They brought in to focus of that section of the society, which was an unusual of medieval literature.

D. P. Chottopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, *op.cit.*, P. 330

⁹⁵ The Sahajiya laid more emphasis on *Guruvada* or stress on preceptor. The selection of a proper *guru* or preceptor for guiding the initiate to the path of *Sadhana* is very important in the Sahajiya school. Gayatri Sen Majumdar, *Buddhism in Ancient Bengal*, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁹⁶ Bhupendranath Datta, (tr.), *Mystic Tales Lama Taranatha*, *op.cit.*, pp.74-75.

⁹⁷ Ronald M Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: op.cit.*, p.233.

⁹⁸ Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious cult*, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

⁹⁹ Maheswa Neog, ‘Vamsigopal Carit’, *Maheswa Neog Rachanavali*, vol-iv., published on behalf of Mahewar Neog memorial trust by Rajendra Mohan Sarma, Chandra Prakash, 2008, pp 18-19; Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhav dev ‘*Kirtan Gosha aru Nam Gosha*, *op.cit.*, p.4; H.K. Barpujari, *The comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-III, Publication Board Assam, 1994, p. 241.

¹⁰⁰ In the Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription (v.18) of Dharmapala (assigned to first half of 12th century AD), M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, *op.cit.*, p. 247.

¹⁰¹ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, pp.193-194.

The Siddhas who were earlier attached to the lower order of the *Varna* based society in Kamarupa, subsequently established their relationship with political authority and received rich endowment.¹⁰² Sahajiya Siddhas played an important role to serve as a contact link among different cultural groups too. The Buddhist pilgrimage, centers such as Kamakhya and Hajo provided opportunity for cultural interaction.

Cripto Buddhist practices led to the growth of new Buddhist communities like Yogini Kaula and Natha. Buddhist tantric performed some rituals, which were against the caste taboos of orthodox Brahmanism. According to some tantric practices male practitioner mingle with female of low castes, and courtesans and thus, force a male practitioner to abandon social pride.¹⁰³ Though Buddhist tantric practices influenced the development of Tantric trend within Hinduism, it did not succeed to eliminate caste hierarchical social values among the tantric practitioners of Hinduism.¹⁰⁴ In subsequent periods, during the neo-Vaisnavite movement led by Sankardeva anti-Buddhist propaganda reached its peak and the propagators of the same urged people to abandon such practices that created social anomalies.

Chapter -5

Buddhism and its Impact on Cultural Developments

This chapter is devoted to inquiring into Buddhist influence on rites and rituals, art and sculpture, language and literature of early Assam.

Many practices inherited from Buddhism contributed to develop some popular practices in the region. It was not only the rites and rituals that were influenced by Buddhism but the influences are noticeable in the philosophic

¹⁰² Scholars believe the mention of Satra institution at Yogahati in the Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala (dated 1154 Saka, i.e. 1232CE), means monastery of the Buddhist Bhiksus where the esoteric Sadhanas were performed.

It has mentioned in the Inscription “ *Adityasama Srisamudrapalarajye PrabalaSabasikasatra Sagunkriya Sanyasin bule Danapunye Saja Yogihati Sak ish yanachakra murha vanati*”

For details, see Dimbeswar Sarma (ed.), *Kamarupasanavali*, op.cit., p.159; P.C. Choudhary, *Assam-Bengal Relations*, op.cit., p.306.

¹⁰³ M. Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment – Women in Tantric Buddhism*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1998, pp.59-60; Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, op.cit., p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ In time of ritual practices in the rites of *Bhairavi Chakra* of practitioners associated with people of different *varnas* but at the end of the *Chakra* all the castes become separate again, i.e., the social order of castes become effective again. There were also restrictive regulations about the choice of partners; a Brahmin woman should never be the partner of a man of lower social status. A. Avalon and T. Vidyarnava ed., *Kularnava Tantra*, London, 1917 Tantric Texts 5, p.96; Suren, Bhagawati and J. Narayan Dutta Barua eds. *Yogini Tantram*, op.cit., pp.84- 85.

speculation, art, architecture, language and literature, i.e. all the strata of socio-cultural life of the region. The late tantric form of Buddhism associating with the indigenous belief and practices helped to the coalescence and emergence of a new religio-cultural trend. All the three major sectarian branches of Hinduism; namely, Saktism, Saivism and Vaisnavism are influenced by Mahayana form of Buddhism. Late Buddhist practices contributed to the development of some crypto-Buddhist practices namely, Dharma cult, Manasa and Ai etc.

In Assam, Buddhist tantrics had initiated the process of assimilation between the faiths of aboriginal, non-Aryan with the orthodox Brahmanical system. The evolution of the Mother goddess Kamakhya is one of the examples of it.

Some unique features of Kamarupa vaisnavism like *Satra*, *Namghar* and the *Saran*, which are not found in other parts of India, are influenced by Buddhist ideas.¹⁰⁵ Sahajiya Buddhism adopted the doctrine of complete surrender to *guru* (preceptor). The same spirit of '*Guruvada*' (stress laid to the devotion to Guru) found expression in later development of religious school led by Sankardeva in successive period.¹⁰⁶ The Tantrika tradition which was indispensable part of Assamese life was considerably influenced by Buddhist tantricism.¹⁰⁷ Tantric Buddhist exerted considerable influences in the tradition of healings.¹⁰⁸

Some customs of Tibetan form of Buddhism (Lamaism) influenced the cultural life of south Kamarup and Darrang district of Assam.¹⁰⁹ Bhor-Taal (large Cymbals) which has been an essential component of the indigenous music paraphernalia of Assam initially came from Tibet (*Bhortal*, *Bhota-Tala*). The mask-bearing dance, which is associated with Tibetan Lamaistic tradition, found expression in the traditional art form in Kamarupa that is known as *Kamrupi-*

¹⁰⁵ S.C. Goswami, 'Hidden Traces of Buddhism in Assam', *op.cit.*, p.753.

¹⁰⁶ Among factions that developed after Sankardeva is known as *Kala-Samhati*. It was led by Gopala Ata who lays stress on *Guru* (preceptor) and considered *Guru* as the representative of god. Similar to that of Kalacakrayana, this section has been practicing esoteric ceremonies. *Kala Samhati Satras* was most liberal in admitting disciples from all communities including tribesman. H. K. Barpujari (ed.) *The comprehensive history of Assam*, *op.cit.*, p.240.

¹⁰⁷ The frequent use of the term *Dharanis* in the mantra is the consequences of the influence of Tantric Buddhists practices as the word derives from Buddhist dharani Suttas. B.K. Barua, *History of Assamese literature*, Sahitya academy, New Delhi, 1964, p.188; Maheswar Neog, *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, Candra Prakash, Gauhati, 1962, pp. 33-37.

¹⁰⁸ K.L. Barua, 'Kamarupa and Vajrayana', *op.cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Pranabjyoti Deka, 'Mahapurusha Dharmat Baudha Prabhab,' *Gariyashi*, 5th issue, vol-I, Sahitya Prakash, Gowahati, 1997, p.32.

Dhuliya.¹¹⁰ Similar with the custom of preserving butter in the granary at *Math*, (monastery) there is granary of oil in Barpeta Satra.¹¹¹ Besides, Buddhism also influenced the philosophical development in Assam. The most important deity of the region, i.e. Kamakhya reflects the philosophy of Buddhist Tantricism.¹¹²

The *Caryapadas* composed by Sahajiya Buddhist Siddha have their deep influence on the growth and development of language and literature in Assam. Many morphological and phonological features of the *Carapadas* have an unbroken continuity into the Assamese language.¹¹³ The *Caryapadas*, exerted a great influence on the pre- Vaisnava and Vaisnava writings, particularly in *Ankiya nats* and *Bargeets* of Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavadeva.¹¹⁴

Vajrayanist used various motifs and symbols that have been found in Assam.¹¹⁵ Some myths, which occupy indispensable part of Assamese tradition such as Madan- Kamadeva and the origin of the name of Kamarupa seem developed out of Buddhist tradition.¹¹⁶ The myth of the origin of the sacred center at Nilachala and Kamakhya that relates to the story of Sati's body and limbs is also connected with Buddhist tradition.¹¹⁷

Buddhist was the first religious group in the region that adapted with local practices, which were later absorbed in neo Brahmanical trends.

¹¹⁰ 'Kamarupi dhuliya' is a popular folk tradition particularly in lower Assam area having the features of semi-drama, song, and musical instruments. H.K. Barpujari Vol (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-iii, *op.cit.*, p. 423.

¹¹¹ Pranab jyoti Deka, 'Mahapurusha Dharmat Baudha Prabhab Gariyashi', *op.cit.*, p.32.

¹¹² The root of *Kamakhya – Kameswari* lies in the *Boudha* Vajrayana, contributed by the speculation of Boudha void (*Sunyata*) Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-43.

¹¹³ Banikanta Kakati, *Assamese its Formation and Development*, p.9; Parikhit Hazarika, 'Carya Pada', Dalimi Prakashan, Guwahati, Seventh edition, 2007.

¹¹⁴ P.C. Choudhary, *Assam- Bengal Relations*, *op.cit.* p.226.

¹¹⁵ The mystic symbols i.e. circles within circles used by the tantrics found in the ceiling decoration at Tejpur, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xxiv, 1924-25, pp.12-47.

¹¹⁶ N. B. The attempt of Kama to infatuate Siva is similar with the Buddhist story of infatuate Buddha by Mara. In Buddhism Mara is the deity of death and desire, the symbol of passion and desire and enemy of liberation. He use all weapons and instructed his three daughters (Tanha, Rati and Raga) to use all arts of seduction on the Buddhistva. With enlightenment, the Buddha overcame his fear of his death and cut off his desires.

¹¹⁷ D.C. Sircar, 'The Sakta Pihās' *op.cit.*, p.7.

Chapter-6

Conclusion and major findings

- The chronological affirmation of the extreme antiquity of the introduction of Buddhism in Assam remains problematic but the archaeological and literary evidence furnish that Buddhism was introduced in Assam in post-Asokan period and before the development of the Aryan culture to the life and thought of the people.
- The socio-cultural and trade contacts and geographical location of Assam led an easy access of Buddhist to the land. Early Kamarupa rulers maintained the cultural relationship with Nepal, Kashmir, China and other parts of India where Buddhism had its considerable presence. The geographical location of the area made Assam as an area of interaction of people of different ethnological and religious traits. The early settlement of the Buddhist covers a large part of area including modern districts of Goalpara in Assam and Garo Hill (Meghalaya). The area (greater Goalpara area and Garo Hills) located near the river bank of Brahmaputra was one of the main water ways of traders in Assam.¹¹⁸
- When Mahayana had not developed into a fully independent institution, a section of the followers of Buddhism probably seceded from original Sangha and had entered Assam. They associated themselves with stupa worship or/and *mantra* practices, i.e. the practices that connect with meditation of Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhists of the region performed their rites in the already developed cultic centers of the non-Aryan or Alpine inhabitant.
- There was socio-political contact of early Kamarupa with the areas such as Tamralipta and Karnasuvarna where both forms of Buddhism prevailed. In Assam tantric traits developed during the early period with the association of local practices along with the importation of some ideas of Bon religion from Tibet.
- These practices were performed secretly till the period of Varmanas. Buddhist tantricism became well established with the ascendancy of Salastambha. Inspired by the royal association of Buddhism, Kamarupa emerged as one of the most

¹¹⁸ For details, see B. N. Mukherjee, 'External Trade of Early North- Eastern India, Hara-Anand Publications, Delhi, 1992, pp.64- 65.

important Vajrayana centers among the four centers that developed in India during the seventh century AD.

- This period and after the tantric or Vajrayana form of Buddhism developed in other parts of India mostly under the patronage of Pala rule of Bengal. Tibet also gradually became the center of tantric Buddhism popularly known as Lamaism. Gradually the non-intuitional Sahajiya Siddhas from different parts namely: Orissa, Bengal and Assam, Nepal, Tibet and even China developed a common bond of religious affinity. Accordingly, this form of Buddhism developed in a wide cultural zone.
- Buddhist Tantricism got its wide appeal among some of the professional castes in Assam. Sahajiya Siddha who strictly attached to *Guruvada* developed a separate institution parallel to the royal institution that patronized *Varnasrama*. In subsequent periods Buddhism failed to maintain its popularity with the same pace.
- Buddhism of its later aspect i.e. Tantricism was going side by side with the development of pre- Puranic and Puranic Hinduism in Kamarupa. Gradual development of sectarian divisions within Buddhism and the development of Puranic cults brought Buddhist practices nearer to the greater tradition of Hinduism.
- The period, particularly after early Salastambha rulers due to the demands and pressures of an expanding agrarian order, the rulers of Kamarupa followed the Hindu ideology and promoted *varna* system. This ascendancy of Hinduism led to a remarkable change in the socio-religious pattern in Kamarupa. Some of the major trends that developed during the periods are development of Puranic form of Hinduism, state sponsored tantricism which influenced Buddhism. The rulers of Kamarupa, who were promoters of *varna* based society of Hinduism also extended patronage to Tantricism. Accordingly, with this state-sponsored Tantricism new development started in the relationship with fertility cult, and at Nilachala the tribal cultic center associated with Tantric form of Buddhism of the early period, developed as an abode of Brahmanical Mother Goddess Kamakhya later on. Gradually, Buddhist tantricism lost its popularity. The ritualistic practices of Buddhist tantricism, Mantrayana, Vajrayana and Kalacakrayana, were absorbed by the new Brahmanical trends such as Satkism, Savisim and Vaisnavism.

- The non –institutional Sahajiya Buddhist who occupied space between institutional esoterism and non-institutional esoterism absorbed many non–Buddhist traditions in their system and further contributed to the syncretism between Buddhism and Hinduism in Assam.
- The influence of Buddhism mostly of its ritualistic aspects found expression in all strata of cultural life of Assam and provided artistic, linguistic, cultural, services for the emergence of a new culture. Even today, the distant echo felt in every aspect of cultural life of the region in form of crypto Buddhist practice.
- It was frequently mentioned in the neo-Vaisnavite literatures about the violation and degradation of socio-ethical rules by the followers of Buddhism in Assam. There are no contemporary source material that throw the light about the sexual abuse or indulgences resulted by the development of Buddhist tantricism in the heyday of Vajrayana, rather than there was great reverence towards Buddha that found expression in the inscription.
- When Buddhist deity in Assam syncretised with Hinduism the former was not generally included in subordinate position rather it enjoyed almost equal status.
- Prior to the Pala rule in Bengal and the development of Vajryana in Tibet in the eight century C.E., Kamarupa became an important center of tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana in eastern India. When after the invasion of the Turks, Buddhist faced a crisis in Bengal and Bihar, in Kamarupa, Buddhists continued to perform their rites till the rise of Sankardeva in the fifteenth century. Kamarupa was one of the most ancient places for the growth and development of Buddhist Tantricism in the world, and served as a last shelter of other forms of Buddhism in India.
- With the socio-political ascendancy of Hinduism, Brahmans, the places dominated by Buddhist Tantricism such as Nilachala or Hajo, either became a place of syncretism or became a place of Hinduise Tirtha.
- It was during the neo Vaishnavite movement anti-Buddhist propaganda reached its peak and socially ostracized Buddhist but many elements of Buddhism also present in new-Vaisnavism. The rise of neo-Vaisnavism and coming of Ahoms who patronized Hinduism contributed to decrease of the popular support of Buddhism.
- Buddhist was the first religious group in the region that adapted with the local cult practices, which were later absorbed in neo Brahmanical trends. Buddhists

were pioneer in carrying the process of acculturation with indigenous people.¹¹⁹ The wider gap between Brahmanical and non-Aryan cults narrowed down by the development of tantricism that initiated in Assam by Tantric Buddhist.

- Initially, the tantric Buddhist practices satisfied the emotion and ethos of the pre-dominant non-Aryan people. The simple individual could not follow the Buddhist philosophy. They mostly performed some Buddhist practices, rites and rituals. Brahmins too considered Buddhist rituals and practices as the essential part of their spiritual mechanism. Therefore, the Puranic trends absorbed all the features to counteract the dominating influence of Buddhism.
- There was no Buddhist monastery to perform social and economic role to integrate Buddhist community till the thirteenth century. Therefore, in Assam Buddhism survived only in the forms of crypto-Buddhist practices that occupy an important place in the socio-religious life of Assam.
- Buddhist Tantricism got its wide appeal among some of the professional castes in Assam. Sahajiya Siddhas who strictly attached to *Guruvada* and developed a separate institution parallel to the royal institution that patronized *Varnasrama*.
- The Buddhist Tantricism which was a strong cultural trend during the development of pre- Puranic and Puranic Hinduism in Assam contributed to the cultural life of Kamarupa. Many practices inherited from Buddhists contributed to the development of some popular practices in the region. It was not only the rites and rituals that were influenced by Buddhism but the influence is noticeable in the philosophic speculation, art, architecture, language and literature, i.e. all the fields of socio-cultural life of the region.

¹¹⁹ The evolution of Kamakhya is one of the examples of the acculturation between the Brahmanical religious system and aboriginal faith that contributed by Buddhist faith in the region.